

Reporting Under Threat

Testimonies of Courage in the Face of
Impunity from Pakistani Journalists

Adnan Rehmat



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DEDICATED to the brave journalists of Pakistan who put themselves in danger every single day, as their stories in this book amply testify, so that we continue to stay informed of the world we live in. With over 100 killed and over 2,000 injured in the line of duty since 2000, Pakistani journalists have literally paid with their blood to protect our right to freedom of expression. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to them.

This book of testimonies was made possible with the help of professionals with journalism experience themselves – especially **Mr Aurangzaib Khan, Ms Sadaf Baig and Mr Iqbal Khattak** – who won the confidence of journalists to bring their stories in their own words to us. But especially all the journalists who were willing to come on record to tell their fascinating real life stories of courage.

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PROFILES OF COURAGE – Storytellers tell their stories

The rise of terrorism in Pakistan since 2000 has made the country one of the most dangerous countries on the planet to practice journalism as borne out by annual global reports in recent years from media watchdogs Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Freedom House and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ). Over 100 journalists and media workers have been killed and over 2,000 injured in Pakistan in the line of duty since January 1, 2000. Between 2000 and 2014, a journalist has been killed in Pakistan at a staggering average of one a month. This is the highest fatality rate for journalists of any country in the world for this period.

The level of impunity against journalists in Pakistan is reflected by the fact that only two cases have reached the primary conviction stage in courts, one for a foreign journalist (Daniel Pearl) and one a local (Wali Babar). Even in these two cases lengthy legal processes remain until the final convictions are handed out. The accumulative effect of this impunity – the high rates of fatality and low rates of conviction – is that journalists are forced to work in tough conditions, often amid increasing vulnerability and risk exposure in the absence of safety resources, including appropriate training, or sometimes assuming self-censorship and institutional censorship.

Considering the high risks that about 20,000 active journalists in Pakistan face, it seems ironic that most people who benefit from their work have no clue to the conditions they work in – from navigating a climate of fear to dealing with the dilemma of their right to safety clashing with the people’s right to know; and from the woeful inadequacy of safeguards for them to the compromises they have to make to continue reporting. This publication is an attempt to fill this critical gap: to hear the stories of our daily storytellers.

And in an attempt to convey the immediacy of the daily tribulations they face we have helped the journalists tell us their stories in their own words. Hence the accounts here are the journalists’ very own – in first

person singular. In some instances, we even bring the stories of journalists who lost their lives – their stories are narrated by their close friends, all fellow journalists who worked with them and knew them well. We asked the journalists to preferably tell us a specific story that could illustrate the kinds of dangers they face – an instance where they found themselves in deep trouble and even a brush with death. All these stories relate to journalists’ work, not their non-journalism related life.

Journalists can report about virtually anything under the sun, and beyond, but they are notoriously shy about speaking about their own work lives. Especially stories that reveal the risks to them and the vulnerabilities they face in a milieu like Pakistan’s where conflict, violence and extremism have made journalism one of the most difficult professions to practice in recent years. These here, then, are stories that have taken a great deal of courage for journalists to tell. They range from the alarming to the hair-raising. From murder to kidnap, from torture to harassment – and nearly everything else in between – it’s all here.

These profiles of courage represent the broad gamut of media and journalism work in Pakistan – geographically they’re from virtually all regions of Pakistan – Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tribal Areas, Sindh, Punjab and Islamabad. Testifying to their vulnerabilities are editors, reporters, photographers, camerapersons and correspondents. Men journalists facing up to their captors and killers, and women journalists facing the brunt of harassment and intimidation – the accounts offer a representative sample of threats they face daily. Also revealed is the broad spectrum of actors that bring terror and torment to journalists’ lives: the government, political parties, security forces, intelligence agencies, militants, terrorists, religious leaders, feudal landlords, businessmen, even civil society organizations – they figure here in the hall of shame of actors tormenting Pakistani journalists.

I am grateful to my colleagues who helped in the production of this publication. And I’m indebted to all my fellow journalists who trusted us to tell their stories and for agreeing to share them with the world so that we can see how truly courageous they are. Even in the face of impunity, they are not unwept and unsung – they remain our everyday heroes.

Adnan Rehmat
Pakistan, 2014

When the suicide bomber came looking for the president of the Peshawar Press Club

Shamim Shahid

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The suicide bomber had asked for me by name, I was told after the attack on the Peshawar Press Club. He said he was a guest of Shamim Shahid, the press club staff who were at the gate and miraculously survived after he had blown himself up, told me. The police constable at the gate initially let him go after he claimed he was my guest but could not answer some questions. He became suspicious of a bulge (of a suicide jacket, in later turned out) under his shirt. As he started to move away the constable asked him to stop but when he didn't, the constable grabbed hold of him. That was when the bomber blew himself up. I heard the explosion on the road. I was two minutes away from the press club, the first to arrive at the scene after the bombing. I was the press club president at the time. We had been receiving threats all that year when the operation against the militants was at its peak northeast of Peshawar in Swat.

This had to be the most traumatic incident in my life, seeing dead bodies scattered at the gate of the press club, seeing that the threats we had been receiving actually materialized into battered bones and blood splattered at the door of the journalists' citadel. I had been receiving threats from Taliban about my views on militancy and for working with Voice of America (VOA). And there were others, several over the years, but let me tell you about one that I survived after the press club attack without even knowing someone was planning to target me.

I was on a visit to Afghanistan in January 2013. I often go there in relation to my work and to see friends. But this was a private visit – to attend funeral of a friend. I stayed in Kabul with a friend. I never trusted hotels, having survived the bombing of Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. In the city I called an Afghan journalist who I had helped release from jail in

Pakistan. When he got my call, he said he was coming over to see me. After we talked – he told me later – he got a call from the Taliban who wanted to see him about a story they wanted covered. My friend told them he couldn't go with them because he was coming to Kabul to see a journalist from Pakistan. When the Taliban asked who the Pakistani journalist was, he inadvertently gave them my name.

I left Kabul that afternoon. In view of security concerns, I usually turn off my mobile phone and remove the SIM while travelling. For the hours I travelled to Peshawar, with a break in Jalalabad where I stopped to get dry fruits for my family, I couldn't be reached. When I left Jalalabad, I saw American troops along the road at Bhatkot, quite a few of them stopping and checking cars. I slipped into Pakistan at Torkham without stopping at the checkpoint to get my visa stamped – again a security measure because one has to travel through the tribal areas before reaching Peshawar. Many of the immigration staff on both sides are associated with the intelligence machines of their respective countries and I had reasons – from my previous run-ins with security people – not to reveal my whereabouts. Usually those travelling to Afghanistan are safe but those coming in are monitored and killed if that is the intent. The murder of Afghan journalist Hashim Zada is a case in point.

Once in Peshawar, I put back the SIM in the phone and the first call I got was from a VOA colleague in Islamabad. He was frantic asking where I was and if I was okay. Minutes later, I got a call from VOA in Washington who said if I had to travel I should ask for security coverage. No one said what was going on. I thought I had alarmed them because my phone was off for a long time. That night my colleague from VOA called again. "Can you leave Peshawar now?" he said. "There is a threat of an attack against you." It was late and I couldn't have driven to my village in the dark. I locked up the house and had the guards on alert.

As alarmed as I was, I had no idea about the gravity of the situation till I heard from VOA in Afghanistan the next day. They said the American security personnel had been at their office asking about me. They claimed I had been kidnapped because I hadn't returned to Pakistan because they had checked with the immigration. Later I learned that the Americans and the Pakistani security officials had intercepted a telephone conversation from Taliban speaking about targeting me. I somehow, unknowingly, managed to stay out of trouble because I left

Kabul before I had meant to.

I had been very vocal throughout the Afghan Jihad, then later through Talibanization and post-2001 period in my criticism of the Taliban, the Pakistani policy of chasing an imagined strategic depth in Afghanistan and denouncing militancy. I have also served as bureau chief of *The Nation and Pakistan Today* newspapers in Peshawar. I have managed to stay safe so far but all these threats have restricted my movement and my work. No local papers now carry my comments and I cannot speak on public forums anymore.

Going bananas chasing the truth

Shaukat Zardari
Reporter, Sindh

It was 9.15pm and I was in my car on a link road near Hala city in central Sindh. I was crouched on the back seat while at the wheels was a youngster with a handkerchief serving as a makeshift mask on his face. The two other guys between whom I was sandwiched had guns to my head and chest, fingers on their triggers. When they had stopped me and pounced on me I thought this was a car-snatching. But if you make your living stealing off with people's cars you don't take the car-owners along if you can drive. Other alternatives coming to my mind made my blood cold.

Where were they taking me? There was virtually no one else on the road, the traffic really thin. In ten minutes I had been driven to a banana farm. My shirt was pulled over my eyes although I could make out things. "If we have to kill him then why drive further? There's no one here, let's do it now," the captor on my left side by the window said. "No, wait," the driver shouted at him. I was pulled out. The banana fields had just recently been watered and I stepped into sticky mud. One of them pulled off my shoes and I was forced to walk with only socks on my feet. This did not bother me as I'm the son of a farmer and the wet soil is something that I actually like but fear was mounting in me as I mentally pictured worse-case scenarios.

After a while they stopped and asked me to sit down quietly, the cold gun metal still on my head. "If you really want to kill me then do it now because I am a man of faith and if I am destined to die this way, so be it – you can't have my soul, only Allah can take it," I said, expecting the worst. The driver turned out to be a softie. He asked his accomplice to take me to the middle of the fields and to wait, saying they should wait for the "others" to join them first and not to kill me in haste. An argument ensued over why not just kill me and be on their way. The waiting stretched on. After about 30 minutes two of them went to the road to rendezvous with whoever was supposed to join the. By now I had

managed to get my shirt slip free off my eyes. My lone defender had his back to me. I attacked him, snatched his gun and flung it as far as I could and ran for my life.

Later after some digging for details I came to know that the gang was supported by a high level political family and they just wanted to get rid of me for my reports but wanted to stage a car snatching to detract any police investigation. This was not the only time I've faced a threat to my life. While recording my *Hardline* show in different areas of Sindh some feudal lords threatened me. In Mirpur Sakro tehsil of Thatta district when I was covering the inadequate development of the area, armed henchmen of the local member of Sindh Assembly tried to stop us shooting local scenes on camera but my team and I confronted them – I managed to snatch a gun from one of them and forced them to go away.

I'm constantly under pressure from my family to either quit journalism or be extremely careful but as a journalist I've always felt that pursuing truth should be supreme. But after the kidnapping when came close to being executed I feel that my life is more important than chasing down the truth when no one except my family will mourn my misplaced valor.

Faisla kis ka? The cost of speaking out in public interest

Asma Shirazi

Analyst, Anchorperson, Islamabad

It was in 2004 when I got my first threat from state-owned intelligence agencies labeling me an “Indian agent.” I took it casually thinking disgruntled elements were behind it but a few days after the labeling, things got worse. No less a person than a serving federal minister warned me of reports circulating against me at a higher level. My organization was advised to sack me. Next, my entry was banned into Prime Minister Secretariat, the Presidency and other official venues.

I was left with no option but to stand my ground and deal with the matter head on. I directly contacted the then deputy director general of intelligence agency ISI with my complaint and asked them to let me know why I was being labeled an “Indian agent,” something that could get me killed by anyone of many for whom this was the ultimate treason. In response to my complaint the matter was referred for official investigation by the agency and I was later told that there was no such formal complaint against me being investigated but that a few people belonging to government and agencies, unhappy with my working, were trying to scare me into quitting the profession.

In the aftermath of March 2007, when Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry was dismissed by a military ruler and as anchorperson and analyst I was doing live shows like many others, I was formally threatened by the team of the President General Pervez Musharraf and his cohorts in the agencies through one of my friends with the following specific threat: "If you will not stop criticizing President Musharraf, you will not be able to go back home on foot. Either you shut your mouth now or we will do it for you."

On November 3, 2007, the day Musharraf imposed a state of emergency, the threat became official. I was banned by the Government of Pakistan from appearing on the media. I was the only female anchorperson who

was banned among six senior anchorpersons. During the three months of ban I received numerous life threats, some of them that terrified me. Again my channel was told to sack me. They also used the carrot and stick ploy. They tried to bribe me by offering to appoint me to the state-owned Pakistan Television (PTV) but I flatly refused. The threats on almost a daily basis came to an end only after the media bravely defied Musharraf's regime and TV channels and radio stations were restored after a struggle.

In 2011, soon after the military operation was launched in Swat (in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) against the Taliban, I went to the northern scenic valley and conducted a series of shows from there for my show titled '*Faisla Aap Ka*' [*It's Your Decision*]. I did one of the shows from what came to be known as the '*Khooni Chowk*' ['Bloody Square'] in the center of the city where Taliban used to slaughter people and hang their bodies to terrorize the locals into submission. As I came back, I got a threat from the Taliban of Swat who warned me that I would be killed for bringing them into disrepute by doing the programs. I was also communicated by official sources about reported interception of Taliban's telephonic conversations planning to 'silence' me.

In 2012, I did a show about the leaders of banned militant and religious outfits including that of Maulvi Ishaq and others pointing out their temerity of addressing big public gatherings right under the nose of the state agencies. This triggered a new wave of threats for me as activists of the banned outfits including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi gave me direct life threats on social media and announced protests against me. The threats from these banned outfits continue coming my way even now from time to time.

In 2013, while working with *Dawn News* channel, doing my show '*Faisla Awam Ka*,' I received numerous life threats from Taliban from various sources telling me to stop talking against them or be ready to 'face the consequences.' In the wake of a media list finalized and distributed by the Taliban to target some TV anchorpersons and senior media persons, I was conveyed by my office to limit my movement and take precautions because my name was on the list.

Despite the various instances of life threats to me, I am committed with unflinching passion to my profession. I can be silenced but how cannot I continue with my mission to be the voice of people and to be the

guardian of public interest? Unfortunately journalists in Pakistan are vulnerable – the horrific statistics of attacks against them are testimony to that – but perhaps what is truly scandalous is the fact that despite knowing about these dangers, our media organizations – and sometimes even journalists – are not doing enough to make sure that valuable lives of journalists are not lost to the myriad threats against them in Pakistan.

Carrying on editing in the face of coercion

Kamal Siddiqi
Editor, Sindh

The office and staff of *Express Tribune* and its allied media enterprises were attacked at least three times between the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014. The attacks were meant to hurt both our staff and our work. A security guard paralyzed from the waist down and three staffers killed in cold blood are a reminder for me – from the vantage point of a working journalist as editor of *Express Tribune* – that our world of journalism in Pakistan has been turned upside down. From government censorship, we have now moved to self-censorship. We are wary of what goes into print or on our website, one of the most popular news websites from Pakistan.

My staff asks me – what next? Some have said that their families don't want them to continue working in this paper. My answer: I don't know what's next. But I will continue to work with my team and bring out the best paper in Pakistan where we will try and report honestly and without bias. That is how we should respond to threats and intimidation. As far as quitting the newspaper because of the ongoing threats is concerned, my answer is simple – how long will you run? Today it is the *Express*, tomorrow it may be another media house (which certainly seems the case as other media houses have also been attacked after ours). Today it is us journalists that are under attack. Tomorrow it may be another profession. We must weather the storm.

Fear is not a good feeling. I worry for my colleagues, especially when the reporters are out in the field. The district correspondents are even more exposed, sitting in places where there is no support system. I think about the staff in Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which is as dangerous a place as Karachi, the country's largest city. Reporters in the country's second largest city Lahore, also a major media center, have also received threats for stories they did about religious minorities. There is no logic that is followed. It can be anywhere.

The government seems to sit idle. They have not found out who conducted the first attack on our media house, let alone the third one. The response time of the police each time our office was attacked was painfully slow. Hearing shots and blasts, there was a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability. We can only write. In all this, our work suffers. We are rattled. We think twice before doing stories that are in the public interest. We are comfortable taking statements instead. Statement journalism is the bane of the Pakistani media. And we have to be careful not to fall in the same trap. So we wait. And we plan. And we pray for the day when we can write freely again. And that is the honest truth.

The pressures of censorship and self-censorship

Hamid Mir

Reporter, Columnist, Analyst, Anchorperson, Islamabad

“Don’t try to become a journalist. It’s a dangerous profession in Pakistan”. These were the words of my late father he told me three decades ago when I was a college student. My father was a professor of Journalism at the University of Punjab, Lahore, and also a famous columnist. One day I wrote an article about the problems of students and sent it to a major Urdu newspaper. My article was published on the editorial page. I criticized government policies in that article. My teachers at college and friends were thrilled on the publication of the article. It was a big achievement for a young student but the reaction of my father was very unusual. He gave me a small lecture very politely about the hazards of journalism in Pakistan. He himself faced multiple pressures after criticizing the policies of (late) military dictator General Ziaul Haq. He told me very clearly, “the government is not happy with me, some religious fanatics also following me day and night; they may assassinate me or poison me, it is very dangerous to write truth in Pakistan. You better play cricket and stay away from writing.”

I was disappointed but within a few months the fears of my father came true. He died one day in mysterious circumstances. Many human rights activists demanded his autopsy but government authorities buried him within a few hours of his death. Fortunately or unfortunately, I never followed the advice of my father. I joined journalism immediately after his death on the wish of my late mother. She was a brave woman. She even encouraged one of my younger brothers to become a journalist and follow the footsteps of our father. She is no more alive to see that journalism is still a very dangerous profession in Pakistan.

Three decades had been passed but situation getting worse for journalists in Pakistan. No doubt that there is lot of growth in journalism in the last one decade in the country. More and more young people are coming into this profession because they think media is independent and

becoming a tool of social change in Pakistan. In fact media is paying a heavy price of its independence. Dozens of journalists had been killed since 9/11 in Pakistan. Many of them were kidnapped, tortured and killed. Sometimes we know their killers but they are more powerful than the law. I know dozens of journalists who have been forced to quit this profession or leave their home towns. I also know some journalists who refused to quit the profession and also refused to leave their home towns and as a result they were killed. Physical attacks and threats of violence represent an extreme form of unannounced censorship in Pakistan.

Since 2012 Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has issued edicts against some media organizations. They especially decorated their edict with the pictures of their two most hated journalists. One is famous columnist Hasan Nisar and other is mine. This is not the first time TTP threatened me. They sent me a detailed threatening letter in 2012 when I took a stand against them after they attacked young education campaigner Malala Yousafzai in Swat. After few days of their threat a bomb was planted under my car and TTP accepted the responsibility of planting the bomb. TTP is not the only threat for me and other independent journalists. We are more worried about the double games and threats by our security agencies. Many times security agencies kidnapped and killed our colleagues but blamed TTP. Both TTP and our security agencies are enemies of media freedom. TTP pressurize media by accusing us of being anti-Islam. Security agencies try to dictate media in the name of patriotism but when we refuse to listen they declare us “anti-state” through their proxies in media.

Take my example. I was first declared “anti-state” by the spokesperson of Pakistan Army on state controlled Pakistan Television (PTV) in 2005. My only crime was that I reached a mountain village of Neelam Valley of Kashmir where Army never supplied any relief goods after two months of earthquake. Intelligence agencies reported to military dictator Pervez Musharraf that I was maligning the Army on the behest of some enemies. Musharraf ordered the Vice Chief of the Army Staff to visit that village in a helicopter and verify the facts and ultimately I was proved right. After sometime a top aide of dictator Musharraf tried to use me against Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Chaudhry and offered me Rs150 million for one television show against the CJP. When I regretted I was threatened and subsequently banned on television in 2007 along with five other TV anchors.

After the departure of Musharraf I started highlighting the issue of missing persons in my television show but I realized that even though Musharraf was gone his policies were intact. I was contacted by ISI, the country's powerful intelligence agency. They asked me to ignore the issue of missing persons in national interest but I tried to convince them that I was only performing my professional duty by highlighting violations of human rights guaranteed in the constitution of Pakistan. My explanation was considered as defiance and resulted in an attack on my children when they were going for their tuition in Islamabad. It was an attack below the belt which shattered my nerves.

That was not the end. ISI tried to involve me in a murder case on the basis of a concocted telephonic conversation. Many fellow colleagues started my media trial on the pressure of a Navy officer posted in the media wing of ISI but nothing was proved against me in any court of law. In December 2011, I received some threatening text messages on my mobile phone. I decided to make public all the threats. A debate was started in our parliament on threats to media. Former speaker National Assembly Dr Fehmida Mirza formed a special committee to investigate the threats to the media. Ahsan Iqbal (now a minister in the PML-N government) was made the head of that committee. I provided phone numbers to the speaker from where I received threats. After few days an ISI official visited me and apologized on the "individual act" of some officers. He said, "It was the act of some individuals but the whole institution does not think like that." I never pressed the issue because I have no personal agenda against any institution or person. The special committee of the National Assembly on the threats to the media submitted its detailed report to the speaker on March 13, 2013, but there was no mention of any investigation about threats given to me.

Journalists in Pakistan don't invite trouble only from TTP and security agencies. Sometimes diplomats of powerful countries also get angry with us. Former US ambassador Anne Patterson wrote a letter against me and my fellow anchor Kamran Khan to my management three years ago when I discussed alleged activities of Blackwater in Islamabad. Recently, I was informed by the management of my TV channel that the head of one anti-democracy think-tank tried to hire a person to kill me. This fanatic is very much known for his links with intelligence agencies. Sometimes he declares me "CIA agent," sometimes "RAW agent" and sometimes "a Taliban agent." My TV channel filed a case against that

person in a court of law and provided evidence that some anti-democracy elements funded by intelligence agencies are trying to blackmail independent media in the name of Islam and patriotism. A Karachi court issued arrest warrants of the accused but he is still at large because he is very thick with powerful intelligence agencies.

Many people think that media is strong in Pakistan. They think I am influential but the fact is that I am not sleeping in the same place for about a year now. I am not living a normal family life just because I am a journalist. If I am living a miserable life in the capital of Pakistan then think about hundreds of other Pakistani journalists who are working in other conflict areas. They are more vulnerable than me. They are facing threat of impunity day and night from state and non-state actors. The government has failed to provide them any security.

What should we do? Should we quit this profession? No! We will not because our readers and viewers are our biggest strength. The people of Pakistan are the best judge. They know we are fighting for their right to know. We are their hope. Enemies of media freedom cannot silence our voice because we live in the hearts and minds of our people. One thing is clear: we, the journalists, will keep fighting. We will not surrender. It is the constitutional obligation of government to provide security to journalist community. Government is aware of the threats to us from non-state actors as well as the state actors. If anything bad happens to us the government will be responsible.

Three decades ago my father advised me to stay away from journalism. Now I am thinking to give the same advice to my son but I know he will not listen to me and the struggle will continue. The new generation of Pakistan will not accept unannounced censorship in their homeland.

Uncompromising journalism

Abdul Haq Baloch (Late)

Reporter, Balochistan

Not too common is a journalist fond of poetry and art. Late Abdul Haq Baloch had passion for both the poetry and the art despite practicing journalism in Khuzdar, which international media watchdog organization Reporters Without Borders describes as “the most dangerous district” for media in Balochistan province. He was also good player of chess and football before entering the world of media. Born on August 3, 1979, he did his graduation from Balochistan University in 2006. However, he began his journalistic career in 1995 with contributions to daily *Awam* and daily *Tawar* from Khuzdar.

Baloch also used to write columns for the two newspapers highlighting problems his district’s residents were facing. The year 2004 brought this young journalist to national attention when he got himself associated with ARY News TV. His colleagues say he wanted to bring the issues of Khuzdar to national limelight. But this did not sit well with groups troubling the district. Masked gunmen riding a motorcycle silenced Baloch on September 29, 2012 for his reporting, shooting him dead. He left behind a widow, 10-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter to mourn his death.

Abdul Wahid Shahwani, himself a journalist from Balochistan, as a friend, knew Baloch and his journalistic work well. Shahwani, who has also served as the general-secretary of Khuzdar Press Club, says of his late colleague: “Baloch was a journalist always in search of the small details that made a full story. He was objective, balanced and fair in his reporting and loathed yellow journalism.”

Shahwani was also impressed with the late journalist’s efforts to promote journalism in his under-developed district where, he believed, fair, balanced and professional reporting would help highlight the miseries of the residents of better in the midst of a violent conflict between government forces and local insurgent groups. “In his life as a journalist, Baloch held several positions at the Khuzdar Press Club. All Khuzdar-based journalists are indebted to Baloch’s commitment to

strengthening our club,” he says. “Like other journalists in Khuzdar, Baloch was also under threat,” Shahwani says. “He was always worried for others and did not bother others about the threats he himself faced, which were considerable,” Shahwani says.

Abdul Malik, a cousin of Baloch says he spent most of his time chasing facts. “The whole family was disturbed at knowing the threats Baloch had been receiving. The parents were urging him to quit journalism and leave Khuzdar but Baloch did not heed these requests and continued doing journalism,” he says. “Why should I quit journalism when I have not done anything wrong at all,” Malik quoted Baloch as telling him some days before his assassination.

After Baloch was gunned down, the government was quick to make promises of recompense but slow in delivering on them. Former Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik announced Rs2 million compensation to Baloch’s family, a job for his son in the Federal Investigation Agency and a judicial inquiry into his killing. “The government paid his family Rs1 million only and did not honor the commitment to provide a job to his son, or any judicial inquiry,” Malik says. “The provincial government [in Quetta] extended no help to his family. However, his employer – ARY News – continues to extend financial support to the family helping the late journalists’ children get education.”

Shahid Rind, heading the Quetta bureau of ARY News and met Baloch just a few days before his assassination, says: “I had advised him to take extra care while reporting from Khuzdar. I understood how difficult to report from Khuzdar it is and that is why whenever I met him I always told him to be extra careful,” adding that the professional commitment of his late colleague did not allow him to make compromises and which cost him his life.

Risking life chasing facts

Syed Abid Ali Shah Bukhari

Camerman / Reporter, Sindh

My job takes me on the road twice a week on average. The cars, trucks and buses today give a different view as compared to that horrific day, the memory of which still sends shivers down my spine. Although, it has been some years since 2007, every time I pass that particular area, it seems like yesterday... The place was PNS Karsaz Road in Karachi and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was returning to Pakistan after years of exile. There were at least a couple of major bomb blasts at the convoy carrying her that day resulting in the deaths of nearly 200 people. I was injured in the blast and it nearly took me a year to get back to work. The violent attempt on Bhutto's life failed that day but like many others I became a victim while out on duty reporting.

It was October 2007. The media coverage plan was finalized after consultation of three days at the headquarters of *Dawn News TV*, for which I worked. Four teams were formed, each with two reporters and a cameraman. Team A had to cover the arrival of Benazir Bhutto from the Airport to the Star Gate, Team B had Star Gate to Nursery for coverage, and Team C and Team D had to take care of the Nursery to Mazar-e-Quaid route.

I was at work at 9.30am that fateful day, and was in Team C with fellow reporters Abdul Sattar and Khawar Khan. Bhutto's flight was delayed by two hours that day and there was a huge crowd of supporters waiting for her at the airport. Once she arrived, amid cheers and emotional scenes, her security team took over in the midst of Jiyalas [workers of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party] and the convoy started moving at a snail pace, snaking towards the mausoleum of [Pakistan's founder] Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah where she was to make a homecoming speech. While we had vague concerns about something untoward that may happen, we were not prepared for the ferocity of the attacks on Bhutto, who was riding a custom-built bullet-proof truck. We had no experience of planning for any serious security contingency and no one, including the hordes of media personnel travelling with and around her prepared.

The convoy finally reached my coverage area and by that time there were thousands of people moving as part of it. Both the reporters from my media house were on one of the convoy trucks giving live beepers while I was just about 20 yards away from Bhutto's truck recording visual footage. There was another cameraman, who has just joined the team from Hyderabad, who was there as back-up in my team. He was doing his first big assignment and his excitement was starting to be tempered by the slow movement of Bhutto's procession as it reached the Drigh Road Flyover.

At 11.30am, I went up the Ladies Police Security Van to make some visuals. They asked me "When will you air this?" little knowing, like me, that they would themselves become news in a little while. At noon, lunch started to be distributed and soon thereafter the first smaller blast occurred. The driver of our official car, with whom I was sharing lunch, tried to stop me from going towards the blast area, but I didn't listen to him. There was a moment of complete silence after the first blast and I remember someone shouting it was just a "tire blast" and nothing else. I went towards him to inquire as to how he was so sure, but before I reached him the second, massive, blast occurred. I was thrown four feet up in the air and I landed several meters away from where I was standing.

I thought I heard the sound of water drip, drip, drip, but I couldn't quite see it. The blast was recorded on tape but, as I was on duty, my first thought was whether my camera was safe. The microphone and lens, I saw, were smashed but I decided to get up on my feet and record footage anyway despite hurting from the impact of the blast because I thought my footage would constitute facts, which would come in handy as I had now become an eyewitness to a major event. The moment I tried to stand up, I couldn't. It was then I saw: the sound of drip, drip, drip was not water but blood furiously flowing from my own leg which was split open.

I have a diploma in homeopathic medical system and so was aware that one can survive even if half of all blood is drained from the body. My immediate priorities became to stop the blood loss, stay alive and reach an ambulance. Amid the mayhem, I managed to approach an ambulance but its driver told me they were only carrying dead bodies. Despite that I hauled myself overboard, over six dead bodies caked with blood and soon found myself at the Liaquat Hospital. Before collapsing, I was lucky to find a reporter from another TV channel who managed to contact my

father. My mother had died a couple of years earlier, I missed her then but had she been alive then, she couldn't have taken the shock!

After reaching Liaquat Hospital, I was dumped with the bodies for a couple of hours. With blood drained, and no water for over five hours. I was unable to speak. There was no one to care as most people thought I was dead. A private TV channel even aired a ticker of my death. Reporter Khurram and Cameraman Safeer from *Dawn News* who had come searching for me became my saviors at the right time along with my brother in law, who had me moved to Aga Khan Hospital just when I was about to lose my life.

At the hospital, I was in no mood to continue with such a life after landing in such a situation, but the presence of Mr Azhar Abbas at the hospital, then Director News at *Dawn News*, his kind words and his kiss on my forehead when I was smelling terribly with blood wounds changed my mind. I went into the operation theatre with a positive frame of mind, with a reason to live. My operation lasted over six hours. I was transfused with 18 bottles of blood. I had just got married six months back, doctors said that there was less than 5% chance of survival for me, when I was given into the hands of doctors but by the grace of God and with the help of doctors, I managed to beat the odds. The ball bearings packed in the explosives and other shrapnel all had hit the lower parts of my body.

When I regained consciousness two days later, I asked my father if they had amputated my leg me, but despite terrible injuries, I had miraculously survived this fate. I stayed in hospital for over two weeks. Thereafter I continued visiting hospital for several weeks of dressing of wounds and physiotherapy. Those were the days when bullet proof jackets were not used by anyone in Pakistani media. Even now though some do, most don't and that's sad considering the risks reporters and camerapersons are exposed to when covering conflicts. Safety measures were nonexistent at that time and even insurance wasn't part of the employment package. Even now things are only slightly better. I never got any compensation from the government despite promises.

My family asked me to leave journalism as it was life-threatening but in today's world, no one is safe. Reporting is my passion and at least journalists do important work. I am still working with my injuries now evident only as marks that are a reminder of risks that we take for people.

The thin line between pursuing news and becoming news

Ahsan Ahmed Inayat

Reporter, Sindh

“Don’t you dare say a word until you’re asked to. And I won’t say this again.” He shook me physically while making this threat and then pushed me aside violently. He went back to a little group of his partners who were already staring at me with anger. I understood that there was no way that I could now escape. So I simply squatted on the floor as instructed and rubbed my eyes in nervousness.

“*Yaar*, it would be too much noise if this becomes news,” one of them broke the silence. “If we just let him go now, [paramilitary] Rangers and Police will descend upon us like vultures. We have him here already – why not finish him off?” My throat ran dry at his words. The skinny, dirty, armed thug had issued the death sentence for one simple reason: I was trying to get to my office on the so-called “Love the Prophet Day,” a day in the autumn of 2012 announced as a public holiday by the government to allow the public to pay tributes to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and to protest the posting on YouTube of a blasphemous video. It was supposed to be a peaceful day but turned into a nationwide, furious protest that turned violent, killing several people.

As I went out to on duty to report how the day went, my wife and mother – perhaps prodded by sixth sense – first tried to stop me leaving home, then asked me to at least call the office and ask them to pick me up in an office vehicle. But I knew that the office wouldn’t want to risk the office vans adorned with large panaflex posters of anchors and hosts. I just thought that if things got bad outside, I would just use my press card displaying the name of my TV channel to get out of an adverse situation.

But then when I went out to report and found myself in the middle of a crowd that after a while started turning violent feeding on each other’s

anger, apprehensions began to worry me. What if someone stops me? Would these people, burning tires on the road, throwing stones at banks and parked cars actually stop to hear about my job, and the need to get to office? I felt that if these worked up protesters in their righteous rage start seeing me as a stranger in their midst, not also raising slogans like them, they may turn on me. So I started taking notes to make the nature of my presence known to them, so that if someone stopped me I could tell them that I am documenting their protests so that the world can know their anger at the blasphemous video. Soon enough some started seeing me as a stranger and as suspicious, and started haranguing me, blaming journalism as siding with the non-believers.

For half an hour I listened to the conversation between those surrounding me and realized that even if I don't die here, I would spend the coming months in a hospital. I could picture myself changing from a reporter of a news to a news being reported – myself as a victim. I started remembering the faces of those colleagues who had perished in the line of duty over the years in Pakistan – journalists, whose deaths I had aired as news myself, editing visuals from the hospital to the funeral. I used to think of their children then. Now, I wondered what would happen to my daughter. Her school, her little joys and sorrows – I remembered and felt that I was choking with grief. I wondered if these people would ask me my last, dying wish.

“Get up, go to the other room,” the same skinny thug poked me with the barrel of his gun. My legs were trembling, like the legs of a convict walking to the gallows. Suddenly my hands were raised in a plea. “Please, for the love of God. My daughter is very young, my mother very old. I'm the only bread winner, what would you get by taking my life?” I was pleading. He pulled me up by my collar. “*Beta*, just go to the other room. Nothing is going to happen. We are only talking to you right now.” His soft tone alarmed me – was this the calm before the proverbial storm? He pushed me inside the other room and went out. The windowless room had an unbearable stench. No plaster on the walls but someone had tried to chalk some slogans on the bare bricks.

“No, he doesn't have any weapons. He is a media person, confirm. Looks fair, the office card is real and mobile number also has that TV channel's serial.” I heard raised voices from outside. “No, no, we haven't touched him yet... hmm... okay... whatever you say.” My ears were my eyes now. I

couldn't hear the person giving the orders, but whatever orders were given, nobody came near my room for the next 15 minutes or so. I allowed myself a bit of hope, perhaps I would be able to get out of here in one piece after all. Then, a young man wearing relatively cleaner clothes entered the room. He had a TT pistol in one hand and a mobile in other. He handed me the mobile and said, "Go ahead, talk to him."

I gulped. "Hello?" "Where do you work?" an unknown heavy voice asked. I told him the name of my channel. "Since when? Are you Pathan?" "No, my father was from Suhanpur." The line dropped and the youngster grabbed the cell from my hand and went out again. I buried my face in my hands and started waiting for whatever was to come. My cell had been turned off, and I was scared that someone from office might call my home to ask why I hadn't reached there yet. This would have made everyone sick with worry, especially in a place like Karachi, where the police asks whether you've checked the morgue before looking for someone who's missing. After a while I lay down on the floor and stared at the static fan.

Dharaaam, dharoom, Dhuzdhuz ... Suddenly I heard the sound of various people walking and someone being dragged. They were dragging someone to the room, hitting him at the same time. Each scream by the poor man felt like a whip across my own heart. I think they were hitting him with belts. I could hear him saying the same thing again and again, "Jaffar Bhai, please, *ghalti ho gayi*. I made a mistake. Forgive me, *maaf kardo*, For God's sake. Don't hit me anymore. Allah, Allah..." He was now mumbling in pain, but the sound of Jaffar Bhai's belt against his body continued non-stop.

For us journalists, editing raw visuals, showing people being tortured is a matter of routine. But living in such a visual, becoming a part of it was a completely new and intolerable experience for me. I was praying that Jaffar Bhai wouldn't step into my room to repeat the same torture over me. After the sound of a few more hits, the man's screams died down. Perhaps he had blacked out.

There was silence again.

Do dil mil rahay hain, magar chupkay chupkay.... Sonu Nigam's old tune broke the silence. "Ji Sir, Jaffer..." His hello told me that this was the ring

tone. "Ji, Ji... I'll talk to him. Don't worry. I've found out his address and about his family.... No, no, he isn't going to leave town... Nah, not an officer, just some small time employee... Not high profile at all... relax, I'll handle it." I wondered whether he was talking about me or the man who had passed out. Perhaps they had gathered this info when they had searched him, like they had searched me when I was brought blindfolded to this house. I heard footsteps, coming towards the room and sat up straighter. This was it. I was either going to get out or...A heavy set man entered the room. He held some documents in one hand, my mobile and press card dangled from other. "So, you are Inayat?" I nodded, "I'm Jaffar. Do you know why you've been brought here?" I shook my head.

"You don't know? YOU DON'T KNOW? You DON'T know why you've been brought here?" He suddenly started yelling. I could see his face distorted in anger. He jumped up and suddenly slapped me with full force. My head started swimming. His ring had struck my skull. "You bastard, what were you doing on the road? Trying to enjoy the entertainment? Didn't you hear your own TV yesterday that no one was supposed to leave their homes today?" He took out his pistol and pushed the nozzle against my neck.

I was paralyzed with fear. Never before had I been this afraid. I tried to beg for forgiveness but couldn't get the words out. Seeing me tremble with fear, Jaffar Bhai moved the gun away. "Get out of here. Get out." He was now dragging me by the collar, "If you ever speak a word about this to anyone at office or at home, then see what will happen....." He was pointing towards the man who was still sprawled across the floor. Angry welts had risen all across his bare back. "This is just a trailer. If you are sent to the cell, we'll make a three-hour film on your body."

Someone laughed and I realized that there were more people in that room. "*Janay day yar*, let him go, he'd die of fear." One of them had pried open my hands, that were instinctively raised for forgiveness, he pushed the office card, bike's keys, mobile and wallet back in my hand. The next moment, I was pushed out to the street.

The sun was going down. I looked up at the sky and mumbled a prayer.

The next day in office, I took the Corridor Three route rather than Shahrah-e-Faisal. I had barely taken my seat when the senior producer

gave me a piece of his mind. “You should have at least turned your phone on. First you take a leave without telling anyone and then you turn off your cell. If you had a conveyance issue, you should have just told me. A lot of people came to office despite the law and order situation and you just stayed at home.”

I couldn’t answer. Could he not see the bruise across my forehead? The fear in my eyes? I felt myself getting afraid again. I recalled Jaffar’s face. Shook my head and recited *Lahol*. “*Abay Inayat*, where were you yesterday? Did you get stuck in some rally?” The rundown producer was also one of my closest friends in the newsroom. “Yeah I got stuck, but then I showed them my office card. There were tires burning all around so I thought I shouldn’t take the risk.” I made up a story.

“What? Are you in your senses? You showed them your press card? *Abayeven* the police wallas are no longer intimidated by press cards and you are showing it to thugs? Bloody show off. If the drag you away *na*, in two hours you’d only be worthy of a breaking news and a red ticker on screen.” He went on without seeing the expression on my face. “But, how did you get to office then?” Between the shockwaves going across my mind, I managed to mumble. “What do you mean how? *Unhikay rang main rang kar*, tied a black ribbon across my forehead, joined the rally coming from Shaheen Complex. Waved my hands in answer to their slogans and the protesters dropped me to office!”

Charged with terrorism for reporting about nationalists

Ali Raza

Reporter, Balochistan

I joined Journalism in 2008 by starting work for a local daily *Ustaman* besides for a TV news channel from bordering district of Chaghi in Balochistan. Since the newspaper I worked for would carry the news and statements of Baloch nationalists and separatist groups, I would also send such news items from my district that caused much trouble for me. I have been harassed by personnel of intelligence agencies and even faced charges of being involved in a bomb explosion close to the office of an intelligence agency in Dalbandin town, injuring two of its personnel. I was implicated in the case and received five years' rigorous sentence from a lower court in absentia. I went underground for quite some time but despite that I have been sending news to my channel and newspaper. Although I have gone in appeal in Balochistan High Court, it has never been taken up. I still hope for justice.

I did not know that I was inviting the wrath of the security agencies by merely meeting my professional obligations. Slowly and gradually I felt that I am being observed and followed by agency personnel in the main bazaar. Then I noticed these people staring at down, making gestures meant to harass me. Information about me was being gathered from the local people. Keeping in view the grave situation of Balochistan and recovery of dead bodies of political workers and journalists made me worried about my security causing me mental agony as well as to my family members.

Once an agency staffer called me on my mobile from his landline number and disconnected soon after asking my name. After a couple of days, he came to my cousin's grocery shop and called me there, interrogating me by putting different and objectionable questions as if I were an active member of nationalists groups and separatist organizations. I tried to explain to him that being a professional journalist, I am bound to provide coverage to the activities of all organizations whether they are pro or anti-government and it may actually put my life in danger if I do not

provide coverage to some groups but he didn't show signs of understanding my argument.

Then one day I was in Quetta, when a bomb explosion took place close to the office of an intelligence agency in Dalbandin in May 2009, injuring two of its personnel besides causing damages to the office premises. I have no idea why I was named among many activists of Baloch nationalist parties against whom a case was promptly registered for the bomb blast followed by police and security agencies making raids for my arrest. I had no option except to go underground as I could not go to court of law due to the fear of being whisked away and killed by the agencies as many youth have been picked up even within court premises and disappeared.

The situation I and my family members were experiencing caused me much mental agony. I feared for my life. In the meanwhile my newspaper ceased publication for not managing to secure government advertisements, which are a lifeline for many smaller newspapers. The court for suppression of terrorist activities in absentia awarded all those nominated in the bombing five-year jail terms. After running hither and thither to evade arrest for six months, I filed an appeal in Balochistan High Court, the challenging lower court decision. However the court while accepting my appeal, suspended my sentence. I am waiting in a hope to get justice and to be fully exonerated from the case, but my appeal has been pending for close to three years now.

In the line of fire in the line of duty

Anwar Kamal

Reporter, Sindh

Suddenly I heard the sound of firing and in an instant a volley of bullets hit our vehicle and at the same time I felt a bullet bite into my left shoulder. Searing pain tore through me. Another bullet hit my driver Naseem and the dashboard was also damaged by another. The unidentified attackers disappeared even as my courageous driver managed to drive to a nearby private hospital but found it closed. He then rushed to the Civil Hospital's emergency.

We were travelling in the DSNG of Geo TV on the famous road of Hyderabad known as Thandi Sarak in the night as we were returning back from Dadu district after doing a story on the polluted waters of the historic Manchar Lake, one of the biggest sweet water lakes of Asia. As I started bleeding profusely, I thought "I am going to die" but was quickly admitted in the hospital for treatment. I was wondering who attacked us, and why? We were just performing our professional duty of reporting on a public water resource. It took many days for me and my driver to get back to a normal life again.

When I recall the incident I was sitting in the front side of the van along with my satellite engineer Ansab Maqsood and driver Naseem. We had stopped at Ponum Petrol Pump at WadhooWah Road in Qasimabad neighborhood after entering Hyderabad. When the DSNG reached Thandi Sarak outside GOR Police Station somebody fired on us all the while chanting slogans against us but I could not see them properly as the tinted window panes were up.

Later on the police claimed arresting 10 people from different localities of the city for investigation but they didn't find any evidence. The police also investigated me about the incident but I had no clue why we were attacked but as we telecast various stories and some do not like being reported about and journalists are known for being targeted in Pakistan for their work all the time.

With growing conflicts to report and more actors to report about, journalists are becoming targets and this is creating a sense of insecurity among them. Various reports published regarding killings of journalist tells us how 'safe' they really are and what kinds of protections they get from their employers and the state. I know journalists who, as a result of a lack of safety and security, are forced to compromise to pre-empt vengeance.

Most journalists in Pakistan hail from lower middle and lower classes and do not get trainings and resources that can help them improve not just their professional skills, which can minimize risks, but also trainings and guidelines on safety strategies. After the attack on us, my family began pressurizing me to quit the profession but I did not find any other source of income and have remained a full time journalist.

Editing trouble in a troubled region

Anwar Sajidi

Editor, Balochistan

I'm the editor and owner of the left leaning *Intikhab*. I took up journalism in 1972. Back in the day, the world – or at least the erstwhile bipolar world – still rallied to the idea of revolution and what's more, they did happen. These days, I still court the revolution, though through less violent means – through a pen as an agitprop. I can still feel the influence of my formative years spent in the company of some of Pakistan's poetical, political greats like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Habib Jalib, CR Aslam, Afzal Bangash and others.

And as was the defining trait of my mentors, I have to champion the cause of the underdog – in this case the natives in Balochistan. This I do through my newspaper published from Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan and Hub, the industrial capital of the province. The Urdu language *Intikhab* is also published from the port city of Karachi, capital of the Sindh province adjacent to Balochistan, which has a sizable Baloch population.

As you would expect, our newspaper's emphasis on people's rights in a province known for a less than perfect human rights record makes us a thorn in the side of the authorities. Not from us the whispers of colleagues who bemoan the state of media in Balochistan. Not for us the fears of colleagues who discourage their children to take up journalism in the restive province with a history of media suppression and manipulation though means as foul as murder.

I have roped in my son Balach Sajidi to work as assistant editor of the newspaper who has, like me, received death threats. The present, with its threats and danger, hasn't blunted our commitment to people and their cause of development, going beyond the immediate. As much as I worry about my son's safety, I'm planning on passing on the baton to him.

Once I was sitting here with my back to the window working. I had pulled

away the curtains for light. The phone rang and I answered it. Someone at the other end said “I can see the back of your head through the window. Should I shoot?” I am human. I have feelings. Fear is only natural. I haven’t changed my routine but I am afraid, not for myself but for the staff in my office. Quetta is the epicenter of conflict brewing in the region. This is where the Taliban first entered Afghanistan from. Whatever is happening in the region, Quetta is at its heart. To that add the Baloch nationalist movement, the counter insurgency, the sectarian war – and you have a theatre that is a journalist’s worst nightmare.

When the insurgency started, different resistance groups came up. So did groups that countered them. Among them was the Gharib Nawaz Baloch Tehrik, the movement that claimed responsibility for attacking Jan Mohammad Dashti, editor of *Asaap*, the newspaper that was, like us, labeled pro-Baloch. [Dashti, a former secretary of the government of Balochistan, left for England amidst concerns for his safety. His newspaper was closed down. He has recently returned and restarted the newspaper since but it is only a dummy paper now.]

We received a threat from the same group. They said we were against the *Nazaria Pakistan* (ideology of Pakistan). I responded by writing in our newspaper that such groups were violent, terrorists and against freedom of expression. Soon after, the nephew of former chief minister Nawab Raisani was killed in a bomb attack in Mastung. A militant organization, Baloch Tehrik- e-Nifaz-e-Aman, which surfaced after the incident issued a hit list of people responsible for killing the nephew. My name was also on the list.

The Tehrik accused us of being associated with the pro-independence Baloch insurgent group that had claimed responsibility for the bomb attack. The chief minister’s family didn’t own the statement. They said we don’t know who the Tehrik is. I went to the nephew’s funeral – there is a tradition in the Baloch culture that you go and present yourself before those who have been wronged if you are blamed for it. The chief minister said the family would respond to the list and those blamed for the killing soon. The next day, they said we disown the list, having nothing to do with it.

The point is we have no enmity with anyone. Since these groups are upset with me, they express their anger this way. I have some land in my

native Washuk district where banned armed groups have taken hold of it and pitched their tents there. They want us to agitate but we take it all calmly. We can't go to our native town of Naal (in Khuzdar district that accounts for the highest number of journalists killed in Pakistan in a district) or Washuk where I have land because we don't feel safe there.

The car windscreen of Nargis Baloch, who edits our Karachi edition, was fired at twice. We have been receiving phone calls that say we are Shia – Balochistan has seen an alarming rise in anti-Shia attacks, killing hundreds. They say we promote western thought and liberal ideals; that we receive funding from infidels and that makes us infidels. And if we don't stop carrying these stories, we will be hit.

Intikhab is read in Mastung, Turbat, Panjgur, Gwadar and Mang that are hotbeds of Baloch insurgency. Riven by active conflict, these areas pose threat to us with militants forcing our reporters to carry their statements. Our correspondent in Gwadar has received threats for being "pro-Pakistan" whereas our Turbat correspondent Manzoor Baloch has received threats for being "a spy of the intelligence wallas" and hence "anti-Pakistan". The authorities blame us for supporting the Baloch nationalist movement and the movement blames us for being pro-state. The fact is we are neutral. When we carry certain articles, we get calls that we have a soft corner for America and India. We say we are a small time publication with hardly any impact or designs.

They say why can't our paper be like *Zarb-e-Momin* (a pro-Jihad publication), *Jasarat* (a newspaper that is allegedly a mouthpiece of a religious political party), *Umat* (another pro-religious publication) or the *Nawa-e-Waqt* (firmly wedded to the establishment's definition of the ideology of Pakistan). Look at these newspapers and be like them, they say.

In September 2011, the paramilitary force Frontier Constabulary stopped *Intikhab* from distribution on the Balochistan University Campus – a ferment of student politics – saying it was not "government friendly". Around the same time, the FC posted uniformed men outside our office without giving any reason. When asked, they said, it was for the security of the newspaper even when we hadn't even asked for it. We haven't softened our editorial policy. We don't publish religious material or propaganda. To punish us, the government has cut down our

advertisement quota but this hasn't weakened us. Our policy is to be humane and be against hatred. We always leaned towards the left, we still do.

Earlier the groups that were not happy with our policy would only protest but now the anti-Baloch groups have set a new trend of killing journalists. I think I am being punished for the promotion of Baloch culture, tradition and customs and creating political awareness among the native youth. My son works with me. My family is more worried about him because it is always the young ones that are hit. I and my son continue to work believing that the day of death is determined. One of the local journalists approached me and my son recently, saying that he had information that some authorities are considering to harm us. This really made me worried for my son's security.

The cost of covering terrorism

Aqeel Yousafzai

Reporter/Writer, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

I'm a veteran journalist who has been covering developments in the border province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for local and international publications and news networks for about two decades. I have authored two books on militancy. Over my career as a full-time and freelance journalist, I have covered Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Afghanistan besides Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Most journalists in the region gravitate to covering conflict. The beat has advantages as it helps boost one's profile and career as a journalist. It also has disadvantages, not the least of which is serious security concerns. As a conflict reporter, you walk the fine line between duty and death and you have to constantly grapple with the dilemma, both personal and professional, every time you sit to write a story.

I wrote a book *"Talibanization: Afghanistan se Pakistan Tak"* (*Talibanization: From Afghanistan to Pakistan*) in Urdu in 2009 that apparently ruffled quite a few feathers in the wrong places. Tariq Afridi, the most dreaded of Taliban commanders called me to say he knew the address of my house and would be over soon to settle the score. The prospect of having him for a guest terrified me. In desperation, I turned to my journalist friends, seeking their advice on what to do. To leave Peshawar was the only option available to me. I avoided coming to Peshawar for one week. And then I received threats from Baitullah Mehsud, the since slain leader of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, through his commander based in Shabqadar, Charsadda.

However, when my second book *"Operation Natamam"* (*Operation Incomplete*) hit the shelves in 2010, the threats spiraled. This book contained a chapter on profiles on Arab militants and commanders – their names, status and nationalities. This irked both the militants and the military, resulting in a barrage of threats.

On an evening in October 2010, I was driving to Nowshera to meet a friend. At Taro Jaba, a town along the way, I felt that I was being tailed by a

Toyota Land Cruiser. Near Nowshera, there was a sudden diversion in the road due to construction. As I braked to cross over to the other side, the Land Cruiser hit my car with a shattering force from behind. My face hit the steering wheel and I started bleeding. I couldn't see a thing. The car went out of control and ran over the construction material. The Land Cruiser stopped a few meters ahead of me. I saw three men hop out of the vehicle and walking towards my car. One of them held a pistol in his hand. Through the cloud of pain and disorientation came the realization that it wasn't an accident. They wanted to kill me.

The car door on the right was blocked by a pile of construction material. In pain and fear, I crawled out of the car towards the left. I wasn't thinking, it was pure instinct that compelled me to hurry, to leave the car. I dived towards a growth of wild bushes behind the construction material and crouched there. They did not see me. I stayed there for long, covered under the cloak of night. Not finding me in the car, they didn't come looking for me because it was a main road with much traffic.

There, from my hideout behind the road building material, I called a friend in the police department and he came to take me to the hospital. I was treated for a lacerated lower lip – 16 stitches on such small part of one's face - and broken teeth. A doctor told me that I could have died had the upper part of my head hit the steering wheel. After hospital, I continued treatment at home for a month.

The incident has affected my cognitive abilities. When I talk, I forget things. Even treatment from the best hospitals in the country could not cure this memory loss. I can't sleep without tranquilizers. My mouth hurts even if I talk briefly. Doctors say I need to undergo a whole process of costly treatment. So I continue reeling under the effects of that incident—physically and mentally.

I have two teenage sons. They were upset to see my torn lip and swollen face but I didn't tell them about the incident. A journalist friend let slip the details and my elder son came to know about the attack. He pleaded, "Baba, please quit this job." My wife insists I should leave the country, the city or quit the profession altogether. The incident has rattled me and scared my family and friends. They worry about my security. When I leave home late, my wife and children call me after every 30 minutes. My wife even calls my journalist friends to ask them to locate me if I fail to

answer her phone.

I have not stopped writing, but that assault has surely hobbled my career. I was writing a column in daily *Mashriq*, which I discontinued. I resigned from the *Dutch Press Agency* because it focused on militancy and security issues. I couldn't afford that anymore. I dropped the idea of writing a third book on foreign militants though I had collected data and discussed it with a publishing agency. Several television channels in Pakistan offered me jobs, but I did not join because they wanted me to work on conflict and security beats. The incident has left me and my family shattered and affected my career and earnings.

Dying in a suicide bombing

Abid Naveed, aka Asfandyar(Late)

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The ill-fated Asfandyar, whose real name was Abid Naveed, might have seen few happy days after the demise of his parents some three years before his own departure. He left his village, relations and everything after the death of his father and even changed his name so that nobody could recognize him. The unmarried Asfandyar was the lone brother of two married sisters. He was not in contact with them either.

He was a journalist albeit not an experienced one. He had joined the profession by chance and had worked with some local newspapers like *Jiddat*, *Pakistan* and lastly *Akhbar-e-Khyber*. The June 11, 2011 suicide bombing in which he lost his life was the third incident in which he had become the target. He had already survived two serious incidents relating to his work. He had suffered serious injuries at the September 22, 2009 suicide attack on Peshawar Press Club and in January 2011 had survived a serious road accident in which he had fractured both his legs.

Asfandyar was still under treatment for his fractured legs, when he went to site of the deadly blast at Khyber Super Market in Peshawar to report and fell prey to a follow-up explosion in which 39 other people were also killed. Having no proper job and other resources, Asfandyar was unable to continue his costly treatment at the hospital after his accident.

I got him admitted in a government hospital and after days of treatment at the city's largest healthcare facility, the Lady Reading Hospital, and then brought him to my office – *Pakistan Today* – where he was provided shelter. I was quiet impressed of his selflessness. He would never ask anyone for financial help even if he had to starve. After the suicide attack on Peshawar Press Club, when the club was giving some compensation to those who had suffered injuries in the incident, Asfandyar was the one who hesitated to receive the amount. I had to force him to take it.

Some weeks before his death, Asfandyar had been appointed at the *Akhbar-e-Khyber* and he had not yet joined the office regularly due to the wounds in his legs. On that fateful night, I was at home when I came to

know about the blast near my office. I hurriedly called my office asking everyone not to get out of the building. I specifically asked for Asfandiyar to confine him to the office as I was aware of his nature. But I was told that he had already left the office for the explosion's site to report. I rushed there from my home which is not that far from the site only to find him dead.

Till then we did not know even about his actual village. I presumed him to be hailing from Chamkani area near Peshawar and called a friend of mine in that village to arrange for a grave and funeral service for him over there. But early next morning his sister approached the Lady Reading Hospital, where his body was still lying and requested to take him to his native town – Nasirpur – for funeral and burial. As he was having no one except his two sisters, the compensation amount which is usually given to all victims of similar attacks could not be given to his relatives. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists was the only body, which gave away a sum of Rs25,000 to his sister for the funeral arrangements. Such is the life of a journalist in Pakistan.

Recounted by Shamim Shahid, a senior journalist based in Peshawar. His own testimonial also appears in this publication.

Reporting between the jail and the grave

Ashiq Ali Butt

Reporter, Balochistan

I have a journalism career spanning over 40 years. For the past two decades, I have been associated with the wire service *News Network International (NNI)* in Quetta as their bureau chief. Some members of a former provincial legislature are on record as wishing I deserve to die for doing stories dictated by militants. The Balochistan High Court wants me to choose between an unwritten law and life, or else leave the profession. The militant groups don't care either way as long as I get their stories across. But they might get me, so they threaten, if I don't.

The news agencies are important if you have to get your message across. For militants and underground groups that want their statements in as many news networks as possible – not just Balochistan but the mainstream media in rest of Pakistan – forcing a wire service to file a story means a lot less work. They don't have to go to individual networks to seek airing or publication of their stories. They don't have to intimidate or threaten newsmen in Karachi, Lahore or other cities where media nerve centers are based. They just threaten us to do their job for them. They call me.

The most dangerous of these groups is the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the sectarian militant organization behind bombings in 2012-13 targeting the Shia Hazara community in Quetta. They are dangerous because they monitor us – both journalists and stories. If we don't carry their stories or report something that reflects them poorly, they don't mince words about their intent. Their spokesman Sher Ali Haider who was killed in 2012 in a police encounter told me that they warn you thrice. If you don't heed the first warning, they warn you again three months later to do things their way. They say it doesn't matter what journalism is all about, its professional compulsions. They just have a certain view about the sect they are killing and the media needs to accommodate it. If you go against their wishes, there is no third warning. They just hit you.

Their spokesperson Haider I knew by face. He regularly left their press releases at our office. He just came in and left it at the table. He didn't talk, except when he called to say what time I left the office and what clothes I wore and the car I travelled in. I was outside once to cover a Lashkar protest in front of the Quetta Press Club. There was a big crowd. I got a call. It was Haider – I didn't know him back then – calling to say he could spot me in the crowd. He said I was standing by the motorcycle on the roadside, writing on a white pad, using a pen with a golden tip. I asked who he was. He said he's someone watching me. I asked where he was and he said, "Right here, somewhere around you."

The people from the banned organizations know where we are at any given point. They call us to give us our location. They give me the time I am in the press club, the office or on the road to the airport. They know what clothes I wear and the transport I use. They know if leave or arrive by a car or a motorbike. You can't lie to them about your location. They know where you are.

At other times, I would get a call from the militants on a mobile phone or a local landline to dictate news. When we called back to check on some information they gave us, you get a voice message saying the phone is not in use. And then they would call from another number asking why I had called. Even if you get a message that their number is not in use, they can find out you had called their number. The same goes for the Balochistan Liberation Army – a Baloch insurgent group – that uses a satellite phone to call us. You call back to verify something and they don't answer. And then they call you back from the same number to ask why we had called.

And so it goes. The banned insurgent organizations call to say they have killed 12 soldiers of the Frontier Corps (the paramilitary force carrying out military operations against the insurgents). The FC calls to say it is not true. The insurgents want their story, the military wants theirs.

Two years ago, a police officer from the Shia sect was killed in a target shooting. The Lashkar called to claim responsibility. It also gave us a list of other police officials on their hit list. The *NNI* carried the news. Three things happened in the wake of that story. First, the city police station registered a case against *NNI*, naming me in the police FIR. The report was sent to the provincial Home Department for my arrest. I haven't

been arrested so far. The police say it has withdrawn the case but I know it for a fact that it hasn't. It is just there awaiting action.

The second, and a more alarming development, was I got summons from the Balochistan High Court when the Shia Conference filed a case against me for carrying the statement from Lashkar about the hit list. I went to the court with editors from *Mashriq*, *Jang*, *Online News Agency* that had also carried the news and were asked to appear before the court. We met the chief justice. He asked when the court had ordered media not to carry hateful statements from banned groups, then why did we publish the story? He said it caused *intishar* (stress) in society. He said he could send us to jail for six months. I told him if we don't report the stories from banned groups, they will kill us. The chief justice suggested we should leave the profession then. I said that won't help because the groups and their threats would stay, so would their activities.

I asked for a lawyer. There is no written law to stop media from doing their work. The court order to media not to carry statements and stories from the banned organizations was just a verbal instruction. How can we possibly follow it when the state can't offer us any protection? The court ordered us to come back again the next day. The chief justice asked us again if we would abide by the court's directive. I said I can't because I will end up dead as the banned organizations will likely kill us. The *Mashriq*, *Jang* and *Online* editors were there too. I looked at them and said even they can't. They agreed. The second time we went to see him, the chief justice was not so aggressive in his demands to follow the court order. When he had heard us, he said we should carry the news without naming the people on hit lists from prohibited organizations. I said we can carry the stories without naming names but we cannot refuse to publish it. We are helpless.

The third development that left me completely demoralized was that members in the Balochistan Provincial Assembly stated on the floor that I deserved to die because I had carried the story. The former minister for health Aynud Din Shams from the religious political party Jamaat Ulema Islam said, "*is par qatal wajib hai, is ko qatal karna chahiyay*" (It is an obligation to kill him"). Other representatives like a leader of the Balochistan National Party-Awami also joined him saying, "those who are not from the province should stay within their limits" – pointing to my "settler" status – I originally hail from the province of Punjab. All this is on

record of the assembly.

I conveyed this to the people in my head office. They say: you live there (Balochistan), you know the sensitivities. They leave it to you whether you should do a story or not, to figure out a middle way. They said *NNI* won't release a story nationally but it is up to me to do it locally if I feel I should in face of demands from militants, if I feel threatened. They have asked me to tone down our stories – *Halka haath rakhain* (have a light touch).

I haven't taken any security measures. It won't help. Journalists are not safe in Balochistan. All they are worth is a single-column news reporting their murders and a Rs200,000 consolation grant from the government to the family, in case it cares to fulfill its own promises. These threats hang over us like a sword but there is no option left to us but to continue in this profession. I have reached the age where I cannot find any other job with the government or the private sector. We live and work in uncertain times now, torn between demands from the state and the anti-state elements. If I don't follow the court, I will be locked in for six months. If I follow the militants, I will live. I am in two minds every time I do a story – whether to choose the jail or the grave.

(Note: In 2013, when Ashiq Butt was interviewed for this testimony, the Quetta city police had filed a new case against four leading newspapers in Quetta – Jang, Mashriq, Express and Intikhab – for carrying statements from proscribed organizations, on charges of spreading unrest in the society and promoting terrorist organizations and their agendas. The case, it was whispered, had been filed at the behest of the court.)

Losing a job to threats from militants

Ashraf Khan

Reporter, Sindh

I am based in Karachi and was working for an international news agency that I don't want to identify. I worked for them for five years as an investigative reporter and earned good reputation on my exclusive reporting particularly on the seminars and the activities of Al-Qaida and Taliban (both from Afghanistan and Pakistan).

He started my career with *Pakistan Times* in Islamabad and later joined *Business Recorder* – both newspapers as a reporter on the economy. In May 2001, I joined *AFP* at its Karachi office as stringer to report on the economy. However, in the aftermath of 9/11 my profile was changed completely and he started focusing on security and terrorism issues. I also worked as contributing correspondent for *Far Eastern Economic Review* and wrote many articles for the weekly magazine of *Dow Jones* till it was closed in 2004. In 2006, I joined *News One*, a local TV channel as controller news where I worked for about a year. In October 2007, I joined another international news agency as reporter in Karachi and continued to work for it until mid-2012.

Since then I have been freelancing for international media.

I got a threatening letter from purported Taliban in February 2012. The letter was hand-written and I received it through a mail service at Karachi office of my organization (*name withheld at request of the journalist*). It was written in Urdu by one Ameer Hamza Karachvi. On the top of the letter, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (Karachi halqa [circle]) was written. The letter read: "*Ashraf Khan: Stop representing infidel media and enmity against Islam. Your every story comprises an anti-Islamic report. We have close watch on your movements. Take this letter as your first and last warning. (From) Abu Hamza Karachvi.*"

I immediately contacted the organization's head office in Islamabad, capital of Pakistan, and informed about the written threat from the

Taliban. The bureau chief advised me to leave the city immediately for Islamabad along with my family. We moved to Islamabad the next day and stayed there for over a week. During my stay in Islamabad I kept in touch with the organization's officials inside Pakistan and at its headquarters outside the country, to find ways and means to ensure the security of my family and myself.

I requested the organization's management to relocate me to any safer place outside the country. They promised to mull over it. After a month, however, they advised me that I better leave the organization and it might mitigate the risk. This was an unfair advice and I decided to lodge appeal to human rights groups and journalist unions. The issue was widely discussed on social websites and it made the organization revisit its approach and they pretended to send me to their headquarters in the US.

On the face of it the management helped me getting US visa but my visa request was turned down. The international editors while requesting visa for me also mentioned in the letter that I was facing threats from militants. After the frustrating refusal of visa by the US Embassy in Islamabad, I decided to concede to the organization's management's offer to quit the organization calmly. I have an agreement with the organization now under the severance package under which I cannot go public and reveal the terms of the package. I have since been unemployed and making do as a freelance journalist.

Foreign correspondent, local threats

Ayub Tareen

Reporter, Balochistan

Now in my mid-forties, I remember I did not wish to be a journalist. After the secondary school exams in 1984 I moved to Quetta city where I was employed in a government department and also began private study. In 1988a friend helped him get a job as a sub-editor in Urdu-language *Mashriq* newspaper. I left it a year later to join *Nara-e-Haqand* then a string of others. The longest period I spent with any newspaper was *Meezan* – five years. I opted to be reporter than a sub-editor – a job not too attractive or charming for a new generation of journalists in Pakistan. At last, what many young journalists dream – getting opportunity to go abroad for professional training. I was selected for training in London. Upon my return home there was a job contract from *BBC Pashto* service in my pocket and I've been attached with it since.

Being a journalist in conflict-mired Balochistan isn't easy and being a professional one has its own added dangers to contend with. Working for foreign broadcasting networks is troublesome when the areas I report from is engulfed by armed conflicts. I have twice been threatened by one of the active groups attacking the government forces in the province. The second threat in 2012 I felt hotter than the one before forcing me to flee Quetta before the threatening group could act out on its promise of delivering fatal violence.

Continuous phone buzzing around 8am on July 22, 2012 woke me up to hear from a friend that there is 'very bad news' for me. I asked him what this was but he dare not say on the phone what was in the news that major Quetta-based dailies carried that morning originated by a private news agency.

I washed up and left home without taking breakfast to discover what the news was that my friend was so worried about. Went straight to a news-stall picking up one paper and glanced at the news my friend was talking about. For some moments, I felt the ground under my feet move. Death

itself is not as painful, I think, as the message to carry out the threat of one's execution. The news was about a statement from the Baloch Liberation Army (BLF), a banned insurgent group fighting the state, which spoke of my reporting, singling me out as a reporter bringing a bad name to them and deserving of being killed, as well as some others.

The BLF followed through with its threats on July 21, 2012 in [the port city of] Gwadar where it claimed it had killed six coast guards. *BBC* follows high standards of journalism and every claim sans official or independent confirmation is difficult to let go on air. The BLF issued a statement the same evening which appeared in several Quetta-based newspapers the next day. It read that the *BBC* should take notice of my "biased reporting" towards it otherwise it would take "action" itself. The BLF usually insists what it says should be broadcast ad verbatim. It was not listening when I tried to explain how *BBC* works and what limitations I have.

The BLF had hurled similar threats in 2011 also. That time it did not disconnect communication. These Baloch insurgents live in mountains and they heavily depend on radio broadcasts and each time they attack the security forces in remote areas they approach the media to provide details. At times, they exaggerate and when the media corroborates these figures with official and independent sources they prove inaccurate.

After I read the whole text of the BLF statement, I recomposed myself and rang up my supervisor in Islamabad who advised me to dash to Islamabad before something goes wrong. A flight from Quetta on July 29, 2012 took me to Islamabad in the evening. The reason for relocating temporarily was to stay safe, away from the risk zone. We all were worried over the complete silence by the BLF. I lived underground in Islamabad for three months as no-one knew where I was except the family who was told to avoid disclosing it to anyone.

My wife was disturbed. She asked me to quit the profession. I did not tell my ailing father about the threat. He was told the *BBC* transferred me to Islamabad. When I had a secret reunion with the family after four months emotions ran high. My father asked me: "When will you be transferred back to Quetta?" I did not answer as I didn't know when it will be possible for me to feel safe enough to return. When I returned to Quetta for the first time since fleeing for safety noone knew of it and the

reason was to avoid risks of likely reprisals from the BLF.

Life in Islamabad was like being in exile. Living without your family is not easy. Islamabad is an expensive city and you need a good salary to afford to live there. I was diagnosed at Shifa Hospital with heart problems and had angiography first and then angioplasty. The doctor told me it was because of tension I had. Had I not been working for *BBC Urdu* service I would not have been in such a situation may be. The Baloch nationalists listen to *BBC Urdu*. Before joining the *BBC Urdu* service in 2006, I was working for *BBC Pashto* service, which the insurgents groups were not following much due to the language problem. That was cool.

Shootout at Lyari

Faiz Mohammed*

Cameraman, Sindh

It was just another morning. After my usual breakfast of tea and rusks, I pulled on a pair of dirty jeans. I knew today was going to be quite hectic and so when leaving home I put in a few small packs of biscuits in my camera case. Covering security operations in Lyari [neighborhood of Karachi] has always been a dreaded and frustrating assignment for me as a journalist.

There was a time I used to go to Lyari as a student to play football. What a time that was! I've seen soccer star Ali Nazar and boxing champion Hussain Shah with my own eyes. Back then, going to Lyari was like going to a huge sports club, which was oozing with raw talent. But going back to the place that has lost such talent due to violence and gang warfare wasn't as horrific as being responsible to show its now ugly face to our viewers.

Yes, I remember another Lyari. The streets are same, same lanes, same chowks [roundabouts], everything is the same, but now instead of ringing cheers for sportsmen you catch whispers of sobs, you can shades of vengeance from the very eyes that used to welcome us – Lyari is the same and yet it is different, a place that I now struggle to understand.

That day a team of security personnel was to enter Lyari from *Cheel Chowk [Eagle Roundabout]*. They had some intelligence about an arms cache, which they wanted to search for and arrest gunrunners. I had to reach Lyari at 10 am along with my reporter, Salman Ali*. Before he could object, I went to the office store and got ourselves issued bullet proof jackets and tin caps for both of us. When the driver dropped us at *Cheel Chowk*, a team of security personnel was already there. As we got off the van, one of them recognizing us pointed us towards the post – they did not want the residents to know about the operation due to start in a few minutes.

We had just sat down in our indicated check post when we heard shutters slamming down on the shops outside. Suddenly we heard shrill

whistles, which was an obvious signal from somebody. Heavy engine cars rolled up outside the post. I picked up the camera and went outside with Salman. The operation was rolling.

An armored vehicle was parked right outside. An official signaled us to get on a police mobile parked just behind the armored vehicle. We both flung our press cards around our necks before getting on. As the car geared into motion, I went over my usual habit of reciting a prayer. Salman's lips were also moving in silent recitation. This wasn't the first coverage of this kind for either of us but nobody knows where a blind bullet may end up in Lyari. So the fear we felt as we rolled into the neighborhood was by no means unnatural.

Our small delegation moved quite slowly through the narrow lanes. I checked the camera and then looked around. People around the street looked at the mobile with plain hatred. After a while the armored vehicle suddenly stopped and we parked behind it. For a few seconds everything was eerily quiet. Then the back door of the armored vehicle flung open, four men jumped out. Four other men were with us in the mobile as well, making eight security officials in all. Sporting latest automatic weapons and bullet proof jackets, they seemed to be hard core, tough guys ready for anything. I look at Salman, and had to stifle a giggle. A young, skinny, little fellow with a marked innocence on his face, he looked completely out of place among the huge, muscular security crew moving stealthy around him; somewhat like a lamb in a pack of wolves.

Anyway he talked to the operation in-charge and whispered in my ear: "They will raid that house with red walls. Keep the camera on. They are not really planning a shootout, but if something like that happens, we have to rush back to the mobile."

Usually the gang members have already disappeared before the security officials reach there. They have spies all around Lyari, hanging from the rooftops, watching from the windows. The officials rushed towards the door of the red bricked house. One of them lifted up his heavy booted leg and kicked the door with all his might. The impact was such the door came completely unhinged. We heard some women screaming, children crying. I turned my camera on and followed the officials inside. On the first glance we could not see anyone in that porch-turned-TV lounge. But we could hear children crying in the adjacent room. On my right

unstitched lawn dresses were strewn over a charpoy. One of the officials swept them off and propped the charpoy in front of the door.

“Ammaji, come out. Fear not. We are not going to do anything to you. Where is Liaquat? We want to talk to him.” The operation in-charge knocked the door and called out in an even tone. In answer, the children started crying even louder. A woman said something in Balochi language instead of Urdu, but no one could understand her. After verbal attempts to get them to open the door, the officials, finally broke that door as well but this time, they weren’t as rash as they had been when breaking the front door. We went inside. Two women were huddled in a corner with two kids. The children were wrapped tightly around their mothers, their faces turned away from us, like kittens hiding from danger.

The officials started searching around the room when suddenly the air rang out with gunshots. The officials’ hand reflexively moved towards their guns. Hadi and I became alert to possible danger. We had just decided to move out and make towards the parked mobile when the gunfire started again and rose to a crescendo. I felt that it would not be possible for us to leave this place alive.

The officials signaled us to crouch down on the floor and left the room in a single file. The lounge, with multiple windows offered a good place to keep an eye out and if needed provide cover for their team members outside. Looking at the officials hunched behind the mobile it was clear that they were trying to take cover from incoming fire. Hadi’s cell started ringing. It was the office calling. I look on, fearful, as Hadi tries to explain in whispers that we weren’t in a position for a live beeper. Before he hung up, we heard a huge blast outside. The impact threw me along with my camera across the room and I banged into Salman, almost snuffing out his breath.

This was a hand grenade that someone had thrown towards the security officials. Suddenly the air was full of heavy gunfire. It seemed nonstop. We sat inside, huddled, listening to them firing round after round only to be met with responding fire. On one side were the security officials, still crouching behind the mobile while on the other multiple gang members positioned behind windows of the houses lining the street.

Don’t even ask about someone with a delicate disposition like Salman. I,

who prides myself for being strong hearted was shocked into an almost comatose state. We knew that we were behind the shelter of not one but two walls but we also knew that if they started grenades, these walls would be prove to be as strong as a simple canvas tent. The firing must have continued only for minutes but to us it felt like hours. Every gunshot felt like a whip across my body and increased the terror to a new level. After another blast, we could not hear bullets ringing across the wall and it seemed that the firing was now one sided.

As we waited inside, I thought about how I'd reach the mobile and even if I did, what was the guarantee that I would leave Lyari alive. And then two of the officials entered the house again, which shook us back to a semi functional state. They asked how we were and then gestured towards the women still huddled in the corner to tell them it's alright. The women continued to stare stoically.

"All clear!" This was another official who now entered the house and asked us to get up. "All clear, let's go, go sit in the mobile, the operation is over." Ah! What relief did those words bring! We stepped out. Still afraid that there might a sniper with a gun pointed at us. But nothing happened. We managed to reach the mobile, which drove us away from Lyari through the same route that we had taken to come in. I sat, head bowed down all through until the car barked to a stop and I looked up to the one wing statute of the Eagle at *Cheel Chowk*. We were outside the danger zone, once again in front of the post that had been the base camp before we left for this horrifying coverage.

Our van was still parked nearby. We knocked on the window, waking the driver from an air conditioner fueled slumber. He jumped out and opened the door. He grabbed my camera to put inside and said; "*Sir ji, Bari der laga di, kia film shoot karnay lagay thay? [Sir, what took you so long, were you shooting a film for the cinema?]*"

** The names have been changed on request for security reasons.*

A broken arm for journalism

Dhani Bakhsh Magsi

Reporter, Balochistan

I'm from Jafarabad district of Balochistan. Seeking a Master's degree in sciences, I took to journalism after the death of my father Khadim Hussain, himself a well-known Journalist of Naseerabad in Balochistan, in 1999 by starting work for daily *Mashriq*. I also started a weekly *Khadim* from Dera Murad Jamali, the headquarters of Jafarabad district, but could not continue for more than a year. I then joined *ARY News TV* in 2005.

I face tremendous pressure from my family to quit the profession ever since I was abducted along with two of my colleagues by the activists of a Baloch militant group Baloch Republican Army (BRA). We were severely beaten and I even broke my hand and sustained severe injuries. I had been warned against covering the activities of BRA rivals but we journalists can't keep our heads down and I did and faced the consequences.

It was really a nightmare and I still shudder remembering my ordeal. It was March 21, 2010 when I spent a few hours in the custody of militants who subjected me and my colleagues to the worst torture. BRA had warned the local journalists not to cover the installation ceremony of Nawab Mirali Bugti, the rival of Brahmdagh Bugti, the head of Baloch Republican Party in 2009. However, I covered the event by ignoring the warning as I was supposed to. Later when Mirali after remaining in Sui town for one year shifted to Karachi, I published the story in my newspaper that annoyed the rival group of BRA. Later in March 2010 someone introducing himself as Mir Jan from BRA called me and said he wanted to give me exclusive news and asked me to a desolate place for interviewing one of BRA's commanders.

I along with my cameraman Shahid Abro and a colleague Aziz Baloch, the reporter of *Waqt TV*, went on a motorcycle to the place where the caller had instructed me. We saw four men armed with Kalashnikovs who stopped us and started beating us. They held us with our hair and dragged us to a desolate place and said since we ran stories against their

leaders, they would punish us. They asked us to recite the *Kalima*, which is encouraged before death, threatening that now neither will we remain alive nor will there be any more negative news against them.

In Balochi language I tried to make them understand that we never published the stories against anyone as we hold due respect for all tribal elders whether they be Nawab Brahmdagh or Nawab Mirali. Suddenly their satellite phone started ringing and one of them attended and got some instructions. Later they started beating us with the butts of their Kalashnikovs and left us there after snatching our cameras, cash, mobile phones, ATM and ID cards and even shoes. My hand was broken. They fired dozens of bullets on our motorcycle rendering it unusable.

After the attackers left, we left on foot and after several hours reached Dera Murad Jamali. We were taken to hospital for treatment. My broken arm was plastered and I received eight stitches in my head. For months, I and my colleagues were mentally disturbed and depressed. We always think that had we been killed in that place maybe even our decomposed bodies would not have been found.

The local political parties staged rallies in our support and the next day the business community also observed a shutter down against the incident. My mother still never goes to bed, unless I return home. Keeping in view the difficulties in profession, I prevented my younger brother from joining journalism. As for me, it is difficult for me to quit journalism even though I live in fear.

A catch and a miss – saved in the nick of time

Fahim Siddiqui

Reporter / Crime Show Host, Sindh

It was a call from Special Investigation Unit on January 29, 2008 that brought me to Shah Latif Town in Karachi. Paramilitary Rangers and Police had planned to raid a three-storey house after receiving reports that militants had taken refuge in the building. Shah Latif Town is a residential area on the outskirts of the city along the National Highway. The episode started when police acting on a tip-off raided a building in the east of Karachi.

The police surrounded the building and warned the militants to surrender. They refused and responded with fire. Soon the raid became a shootout and firing started from everywhere. I called the assignment desk at my Geo News TV and asked for the DSNG to reach the spot before I did. I beat them to Sector 17-A of Shah Latif Town and joined the operation team which was busy fighting the militants. Someone who has witnessed the army operations in Karachi in the early 1990s, covering such raids was once a routine for me.... but it is never totally safe however well prepared you are.

When I reached there, there was heavy firing going on. A militant was lying on the ground and a deputy superintendent of police and a head constable had sustained injuries who later died on their way to the hospital. I took my position close to the spot of action and asked the camera crew to maintain a distance from the spot. Then started a marathon of live beepers from the spot and the camera crew remained busy making and transmitting the visuals. As I was quite a distance from the camera team, I was unable to give live hits, which doesn't go well with the producers sitting in office.

The gunbattle was ferocious and continued for five hours. By the time it stopped, some of the militants managed to escape. Those who were left stopped firing but did not present themselves for arrest. That is when the police decided to ram the door of the house with the help of an armored

vehicle. After tearing the door down the team entered the house and spread. Some members went to the top floor, some to the top while a police officer Latif Siddiqui, an unidentified Rangers official and I were the one who entered the rooms on the ground floor.

As far as the safety measures for reporters were concerned, back then there was still no concept of bullet proof jackets, despite the city witnessing an attempt on the life of Benazir Bhutto at PNS Karsaz. Over a hundred people including some journalists lost their lives in that attack, yet safety as an institutional responsibility was still non-existent and an untrained crime reporter had to act as efficiently as a police officer who was fully trained for such events.

Coming back to the gunbattle, we entered the house which had a couple of rooms as large as halls. Electricity was playing hide and seek in the city in those days with frequent unannounced breakdowns running into several hours at a stretch, but thank goodness there was light at that time. The first room we searched was empty but dim-lit. There were noise coming from other floors and it seemed the other teams had some success in capturing someone but the ground floor had no signs of life.

Then the three of us proceeded to the room opposite to the first one. This one was also empty but quite dark. A shoe box was lying there at the entrance. I thought it could prove to be valuable evidence so I decided to enter and bring it to the notice of the Town Police Officer Siddiqui. That decision of mine could have ended my life had it not been for Siddiqui. His torch saved me as using the light and his head he deduced what I could never ever have imagined. A grenade was planted in the box and we could have all died had I entered the room and touched the string attached to the bomb with my foot.

The police from other floors convened in the main hall with three women and four children. They seemed to be the family of the militants who had fled. A man was also arrested who said he was taken hostage by the militants at gunpoint and was forcefully kept inside the house. The biggest catch of the day was Qasim Toori, member of the banned outfit Jundullah. He was involved in an attack on the Karachi corps commander in Clifton area in 2004 in which 10 people had died.

The police completed the operation arresting three other Jundullah

activists and capturing a huge quantity of ammunition and equipment used in suicide bombings. The National Assembly elections were just a couple of weeks away and with suicide jackets recovered it indicated that the militants were planning a major attack in the city. Police averted a disaster but I would always be thankful to the police officer who acted in the nick of time and saved me from a disaster. It sure was a close call! And goes to show why professional training on safety for journalists is important.

Naked intimidation

Faqeer Abdul Qadoos

Reporter, Punjab

We have heard and read stories of women being paraded naked in the bazaars and streets in Pakistan in revenge. I was unfortunate enough to have witness such an incident while out reporting. In 2006, an incident took place in Rahim Yar Khan district of Punjab. This is a large agricultural district on Punjab's border with Sindh province.

A local peasant in Rahim Yar Khan used his life's savings to buy some land and build a house for his family. When the peasant fell on hard times, he was forced to rent out his place to someone. But the man who rented the place was both corrupt and powerful. He had connections with some religious and political factions around town and was also linked to powerful traders. Once he moved into the house he refused to leave. One day when he was out of town, the landlord seized the opportunity to move his family back into his house. However, when his renter found out, he came back with a group of armed men.

The poor landlord was subjected to severe torture. His family including the women were beaten and tortured. After they were done beating the family, the women were dragged out. Their clothes were torn and they were forced to run naked across the streets. This happened barely 20 meters from the house of a sitting minister of state. Hundreds watched the humiliated women. Yet, initially, no action was taken. The story was ignored by most of the media.

A reporter and columnist for daily *Jang* Multan edition, I decided to work on the story. I wrote a column condemning the misuse of force and the silence from related quarters. As soon as the column was published, I started receiving calls, threatening me with dire consequences, soon the threats turned into physical violence.

On July 30, 2006, I went to District Press Club to address a workshop. When I got there, I found the same persons waiting for me who had tortured the women. They were accompanied by armed men. The original group started beating me. I was thrown on the ground, punched

and kicked all over. Soon they took up canes and started beating me with them. The armed men stood guard, waving around their guns to ensure that nobody interfered.

Dozens of journalists were gathered in the press club for the workshop. They were forced to witness the horrific scene unfolding in front of them. After beating me for a while, the attackers tore my clothes off. I was subjected to the same force humiliation I had written against. I was tortured nude, in front of the journalists.

By the time I fainted my body was completely covered in bruises. The attackers took off, threatening the other journalists as they went if they dared reported the incident. I was shifted to Sheikh Zayed Hospital where my condition was declared critical, but thankfully I started to recover. The doctors were initially afraid of infection spreading in my body. My treatment continued for a month and half.

Strangely my organization refused to even publish a single news item about the attack on me. I wrote letters to the president and chief justice of Pakistan but got no response. When I finally contacted higher ups at the police, I received a curt reply: 'this incident never happened'.

Law and law enforcement

Hassan Pathan
Reporter, Sindh

I watched him as he picked up his phone and yelled “connect to the police station!” In a minute, the police officer was cursing his subordinate at the station and then asked him to immediately dispatch a police mobile van. He slammed down the phone and turned to me. “How dare you write news stories against us? Who the hell do you think you are?”

I didn’t know how to respond. As I looked around the room, I felt a sudden chill in my heart. Sitting with the police officer were some of the city’s most influential men, one of whom had been accused of using the police force to abduct and torture one of his rivals. I wondered whether the mobile was being called to arrest me or would it end up in my forced disappearance. It was June and Naushehro Firoz, Mithyani, was going through the usual mid-year heat spell. The air conditioner running in that room provided much needed respite from the heat but it also meant that the room was closed and our voices couldn’t be carried out of the room. I should have been on my guard but I was asked by an influential source to go to that office.

The police officer sitting in that office was well known around the small town for his temper. Some of us believed he had been involved in staged police encounters that ended in some persons being killed. Taking cue from the officer, the other police officers present in the room also started pressurizing me. A couple of them took my side, telling the officer that he is one of our own people, he couldn’t have run the news, he’d let you know that he wasn’t the one who filed this news.

I controlled my fear and almost whispered, “No, I have run the story!” The police officer lost his temper again. “You’ve termed me cruel in your story. Do you think I’m cruel?” I clarified that I had not used that word in my script. It might have been added by my organization. The powerful man accused of using the police for his own purposes jumped in and asked why did I run the story? I told him it was my job and if he has objections on the news, I could run his version as well. The police officer yelled: “publish a retrieval of the news immediately, or else it won’t be good for

you.” I asked him to give the order to me in writing, give me written instructions and I’d get them published. He started getting angrier. “Did you get instructions from us before you wrote the story? Why are you asking for instructions now” he asked.

“Why are you taking it so personally? The news doesn’t name you, does it?” I asked the officer; “Did you arrest this man’s rival?” My questions weren’t going down well with the police. They claimed that they did not have anything to do with that case. They claimed that my story was putting them in danger. And the man arrested wasn’t linked to the influential man present in the room but a ‘criminal.’ He blamed me for creating a ruckus over the arrest of a criminal. By then I was getting more concerned for my safety and wanted to get out of that office. I asked them what exactly did they want from me? The police officer once again demanded that I publish a piece taking back the original story. I said I couldn’t write that down immediately, and would have to consult with friends.

Then I asked permission to leave and was both surprised and relieved when no objections were raised. One of the men, the one who had originally called me to that office, followed me outside and said: “I called you here and talked to you because you are one of our own.” I told him he shouldn’t have called me and put me in that situation. “You know the temperament of that police officer. We had to convince him that he should just talk to you and try to make you understand.” I raced out.

Looking back, I think I had put myself in real danger that day. Nobody knew where I was going. I knew how dangerous those people were, yet I had failed to alert my organization that the news was sensitive. I think I should have tried to include the version of the accused and the police as well. But that day as I sat in a cramped little office, facing an influential and powerful man, and a law enforcement officer who was most likely involved in an illegal abduction, I had nobody to fall back on. My news story was later used as the basis of a petition filed by the missing man’s brother. But the man whose disappearance had prompted the story was never found.

Killed – the reporter with a heart

Hayatullah Khan (Late)

Reporter, Tribal Areas

I was sitting in the office of one of my journalist friends in Mirali in 1999. I was shocked when I read a news piece on the front page of the daily *Ausaf*. It was about the alleged corruption and atrocities of the local administration against the poor vendors of Mirali bazaar, a dateline of the story clear as it was by the byline story reported by now late Hayatullah Khan Dawar. It was perhaps his debut in the field of journalism and I did not know him before that day. After asking about him my friend Nasir and I went to see the new journalist in a smaller town of Mirali.

I myself had bitter experiences with the local administration so I wanted to inform the new journalist about the likely retaliatory threats against him. When we entered his office, he welcomed us and offered a cup of tea. We discussed many things and shared tips about reporting and coverage of issues affecting our area. We quickly became friends and after that day we used to meet frequently.

Hayatullah, though junior and inexperienced in this field and that too from a typically hardliner tribal area like Mirali, never compromised over reporting all kinds of issues from crime news to sensitive social issues that no one else touched. He was smart, young and passionate while working for free for a newspaper but worked hard and soon became established as a top-of-the-line reporter from not only the station of Mirali but came to be known as one of the best reporters from the entire Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

He was the rare breed from amongst the tribal journalists who were not writing stories in favor of the political administration to curry favor. He always searched for investigative stories having a distinct human touch. Perhaps that was the reason that one could always see people sitting in his office, which he used as phone call center, sharing with him

grievances against the powerful administration and the next day Hayatullah would publish their grievances without bothering for the consequences.

Hayatullah was in the truest sense a people's reporter, a guardian of public interest and by assuming a "no compromise on reporting" suffered even before the growth of militancy in the region. After 9/11, he became more active than all of us reporting from the region. He was the one who felt very early the seriousness of the issue of militancy affecting people and their lives and the importance of the area we were reporting from. That was probably why he shone brighter than all of us in a very little span of time after 9/11. He learnt how to multisource information, compile reports and prepare documentaries that became sought after by international media. Thus he became famous and became attached to international media organizations wherein he broke several stories of high importance.

Once he issued a news story about the killing of a notorious extortionist and serial killer for which he had to suffer a lot as the family of the killed issued him serious threats. It was only after some of us friends who convened a jirga that resulted in solving the issue amicably. But Hayatullah was not one to bow down to any kind of pressure. He once was asked by an army commandant not to report a press conference of a local tribe but he went ahead and reported anyway. The commandant had his son and daughter expelled from the army public school. In the same way he was exiled from North Waziristan Agency by the then political agent who tried to influence him to tone down his reporting about the administration but he chose exile over conformity. The exile ended after dozens of subsequent reports by other media about the political agent proved Hayatullah right.

The reporting that ultimately cost him his life was about a drone attack in 2005, of the first such attack that came to limelight. He disclosed it publishing a picture of a piece of missile clearly inscribed with the words "Made in USA" even though the government of General Pervez Musharraf vehemently denied it. He used to say before his abduction after the report that he has been receiving threats from unknown quarters and I asked him to go dormant for some time but in typical fashion he said he had done nothing wrong and so wouldn't. He was abducted and his body was found some months later with several bullet

wounds. Many of us suspect the security agencies were involved in his murder. Our suspicions strengthened when a judicial commission that investigated his death produced a report that the authorities have doggedly refused to make public.

This account of Hayatullah Khan, who was killed in 2006, is by his colleague Ihsan Dawar, himself a journalist from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Reporting about militants and the fragility of safety

Salimullah Khan*

Reporter, Tribal Areas

It was in the year 1989 that I joined an Islamabad-based English language daily (name withheld on request). I had no experience in journalism nor had any intent to venture into this perilous profession. In fact I was looking for a part-time job before appearing in the competitive examination conducted every year for superior services of Pakistan. A friend who helped me in getting the job in the paper believed it will help improve my knowledge about current affairs and also English language skills. I trusted my friend's advice staring as a staff reporter. So, it was coincidence and not an intent that I choose to become a journalist.

I worked with the daily for nearly two years and later joined another English newspaper. In the meantime, I also pursued my ambition to join the country's superior services but was unlucky to make it on merit. In 1993, I distanced myself from journalism due to some family problems and remained away from this field for almost nine years. In 2002, a national level English newspaper offered me to work as correspondent from Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas which I willingly accepted as I never really broke free of the 'journalism bug'. I have since been working for both national and international media.

It was around January 2007 that I filed a report for my broadcasting network (name withheld due to security concerns) about fighting between two rival militant groups of Bara Town in Khyber Agency. One of the groups, the Lashkar-i-Islam (LI), suffered many casualties which I reported on the basis of my information from reliable sources. Activists of both warring groups along with the ordinary people of Bara would keenly listen to the network's news bulletins and the moment the news was broadcast, the dreaded LI chief Mangal Bagh called me on my cell phone and threatened me with dire consequences if I ever reported against his organization in the future.

Immediately I called my network management and apprised them about

the threat along with a request not to rebroadcast the news. They agreed and immediately removed my report from their regular broadcast on that day. However, Mangal Bagh was again annoyed with another report when I included comments of one of his rivals in my report. The same night he said on his illegal FM radio that this guy (naming me) is “liable to be given exemplary punishment.” I talked to him on phone the next day and it was after prolonged persuasions that he agreed to take back his ‘verdict’ that had signaled his supporters to target me.

In January 2010, I filed a report for my radio on the situation in Orakzai Agency where the army had launched a military operation against the Taliban. I had learnt from my independent sources, which the officials also acknowledged, that the army had plugged some entry points to Orakzai Agency so as to prevent Taliban from fleeing the area. I just mentioned the areas where army had established check points. But the next day the local Taliban commander rang me up and said they were not happy with my reporting and mentioning the names of areas where they had bases. They ‘advised’ me to refrain from quoting such ‘accurate’ information which according to them to provide a tip-off to the army to later bomb those areas. After receiving the call, I stopped reporting about Orakzai operation for nearly three months as was advised by my network’s management.

The most agonizing moment was when Taliban killed one of my close friends who was also a tribal journalist. The incident terrorized all those tribal journalists who work for radio stations as the Taliban said that some more correspondents were on their hit-list and I was one of the journalists to be the likely next target of the militants. Everybody, including friends, colleagues and the network management, was concerned as the threat this time was very clear and pointed directly towards us. I was scared and felt insecure. For a number of days I did not speak to even close friends and tried unsuccessfully to conceal the level of threat I was faced with.

The tragic killing of my journalist friend also coincided with the wedding of my daughter which further compounded the situation for me as I was advised to avoid public appearances and also try not to share my predicament with ordinary people. It was at this moment that I almost made up my mind to quit journalism, but colleagues instead advised me to tide over the situation by staying away for a while and avoiding public

appearances. I tried to keep my family ignorant of the threat I was facing, as I did not want to make them uneasy and uncomfortable. But my family could understand how much I was upset with the killing of the tribal journalist and they would always ask: 'why I am not going to my workplace and why had I stopped reporting.' However, I talked to two of my brothers and explained them in details the level of threat and how much I felt insecure.

Again, for full four months I did not file a single report for my network. Reporting for Pakistani newspaper had never caused me any inconvenience. It is the work I am doing for a foreign media network which is landing me in hot waters at times. I never tried on my own to keep contacts with any of the militant group as I believe that they are all untrustworthy and it takes for them but a minute to disown their own statement. It was because of this reason that most of the time I tried to avoid unknown phone calls helping myself stay away from calls being made by the Taliban leaders or commanders. This did help me and I believe this was the best 'coping mechanism' I had adopted. It not only eased my tension but also provided me with an opportunity to engage myself in some other productive activities like reading, etc. I tried my utmost to avoid reporting on militancy and I believe if anyone adopts this strategy, they can escape the attention of the militants. But I know it for sure that they are still monitoring our reporting and, thus, it is quite like 'playing safe' to distance oneself from covering militancy.

** The name has been changed on request for security reasons.*

Taken prisoner for reporting

Iqbal Hussain

Reporter, Tribal Areas

I was kidnapped on October 28, 2011. Apparently I had annoyed a group of sectarian militants for not carrying their version in the news items about them. They wanted highlighting their version against the rival sect's. It was about 3 pm when a white color car intercepted the van I was riding on my journey home back from Peshawar. It was a few kilometers from the spot where a link road leads towards our hometown. As the coach driver stopped the vehicle on a traffic signal by the car, one of the car inmates quickly jumped into the van. He quickly started tapping the passengers one by one on the head while a masked man sitting in the car nodded his head in the negative.

When the man tapped my head the masked man nodded his head in the affirmative. "Come down," he bellowed and scared out of my wits I did without any resistance. He shoved me into the car with I sandwiched between two men so that I couldn't escape. The masked man sat in the front seat by the driver. Even before the signal turned green and the car started moving, I had been blindfolded and my hands tied up behind my back.

Following instructions on phone they marked my arm with my name for identification and also snatched my mobile set, wrist watch and about Rs8,000 that I had in cash. As the car sped they kept asking me to recite the *kalima* and kept rubbing a sharp object on my neck from time to time as if they would slaughter me. They were terrorizing me. After a length of time the car stopped, I was dragged out and told to sit down on the ground, and my blindfold was removed. It was a deserted place and the sun was setting. "Turn your face," I was told and what I saw was a deep ravine before me. I was terrified. They were surely going to push me down the ravine to my death but possibly not before shooting me.

I begged them to untie my hands so that I can offer Maghreb prayers, but in vain. They said I would be punished for my reporting. After some time I was blindfolded again, shoved back into the car and we started moving again on the mountain road with trees all around. By the time of the *Isha*

prayers I found myself in a cave in the mountain. The blindfold was removed and two men stood in front of me. Accepting my request they freed my hands so that I offer prayers. I was to stay here for a few days.

The detention center had a bathroom that I used for ablution for prayers. They also brought a dispenser in a mask for treatment because I fell ill, giving me medicines. On the sixth day two men, one of them known to me, came and told me that I have been granted pardon. Once again I was blindfolded before being taken out. After a few hours of travel I was set free at a distance from my village where from I managed to reach home. My captivity was a terrifying experience. Every day I expected to be killed.

Though the political administered initially made some arrests after I was abducted, my family's wise strategy made my eventual release possible. My family not only held negotiations with the captives but kept the case in low profile to avoid any harm to me. Later I succeeded in precisely identifying the group that had kidnapped me. I received some calls warning me against exposing them. I avoided confrontation and opted for caution to save my life.

Placed on a hit list

Iqbal Khattak

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Becoming a journalist was purely a coincidence for me. When given a chance in *The Frontier Post* as proof-reader in 1989 I began taking real interest in this profession. After three months in the proof-reading section my services were transferred to the newsroom where I worked for the next 10 years in different capacities such sub-editor, sports editor, edition in-charge and assistant editor before I quit this newspaper in 2000. I joined *The Friday Times* in 2001 as correspondent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and later went on to join the *Daily Times*.

My association with Paris-based global media watchdog organization Reporters Without Borders as correspondent since 1999 reporting press freedom violations in Pakistan brought the issue of freedom of press and freedom of expression closer to my heart. In 1999 I helped RSF launch the “*The Taliban and The Media*” report. It was the first such report detailing freedom of press and freedom of expression in Afghanistan under the ultraconservative Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001.

I recall the time when I made it to a hit list. As I turned left and onto Sir Syed Road while on the way to my office on the Old Bara Road in Peshawar, my cell phone started ringing. It was April 29, 2009, around 3pm. The voice at the other end was familiar and he immediately passed on a few words to warn me that I have just been added to a hit-list of some non-state actors in Swat. “We have intercepted communication of these men who named you and two other [senior] journalists – Shamim Shahid and (late) Sohail Qalandar – and [the non-state actors] may cause physical harm to you.”

The message upped my heartbeat and so did my car’s speed. Once in the office I sank into my seat holding my head in my hands furiously trying to think which of my reports had irritated these people and awarded me the dubious distinction of making it to their hit list. Suddenly it struck me: “I should go through all stories I had filed during the last two months.” The idea worked and the last paragraph of one of my investigative reports for Paris-based global media watchdog organization Reporters

Without Borders explained why I could be put on this hit-list and who.

The phone call had come a day after a pamphlet was seen on April 28, 2009 posted outside newspaper and TV channel offices in Mingora, district headquarters of Swat Valley with banned militant outfit 'Tehreek-e-Taliban Swat' spokesman Haji Muslim Khan owning the threatening pamphlet. Click the link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP0eUmXF7bU> and you can watch Muslim Khan's interview with Dunya TV about this pamphlet in which journalists were warned of "punishments under Sharia laws" if they report negatively about the Taliban.

Unlike most journalists I decided to investigate how serious or genuine the threat was. Three days after I received the news that Shamim, Sohail and I, plus some other undisclosed journalists were on hitlist of the Swat Taliban I phoned Muslim Khan on his cellphone number – 0308-8476061 - to seek confirmation about the hit list. He flatly denied it saying since he deals with the media on behalf of the Swat Taliban there is no such hit list. "This hit list may have been prepared by those who you [media] support [indirect reference to the government or military]," he said.

When asked if he could say for sure that one of the member organizations or supporters of the Taliban had not prepared such a list, he responded: "Let me check and I will get back to you." He never did so it was not easy to reach a conclusion and the investigation continued for almost a month before we decided to take the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, the main representative body of journalists in Pakistan, into confidence, detailing the threat and investigations made so far. The letter, addressed to the PFUJ president, was also cc'd to all relevant civilian and military authorities and press freedom organizations such RSF, Committee to Protect Journalists and International Federation of Journalists.

The government responded to the letter and a senior police official in Peshawar invited Shamim, Sohail (who did not turn up) and me to discuss our security concerns. The official proposed to provide us police guards, which we declined. He then suggested applying for special permit to carry automatic weapons. We declined again. Instead we asked for sharing of intelligence with us of the reported interception of non-state actors' communications. The outcome of our efforts to dig out who really

was threatening us made the would-be perpetrators of the would-be crime that the targets –Shamim, Sohail and I – to back off. The lesson was clear: if you are unaware of the danger coming towards you it helps the executor take out the target easily but if you are aware what is happening around you it makes it difficult for the executor to take out the target.

A bullet for a cause

Irfan Ahmad Rana

Reporter, Balochistan

In the time that I have worked for various newspapers and TV channels including *Capital TV*, *daily Bakhbar*, *daily Mashriq* and *Express TV* in Balochistan and Islamabad, the last decade has been the hardest. I have been receiving threats from banned sectarian outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) that has left a long trail of blood in the wake of brutal attacks on people from Shia sect in Balochistan, mainly the Hazara community in Quetta, attacks for which they've claimed responsibility. During these years, my family and I have suffered much anguish. I have caught myself thinking on occasion of quitting journalism to bring back peace of mind and to protect my young.

It was July 2004, a bloody Friday. I got the news at the *Mashriq* office where I worked at the time that a suicide bomber had attacked [Shia worship place] Imambargah Kalaan, killing more than 50 people and injuring 100 other. Soon after, the authorities imposed a curfew. Our editor called us up to his office where he gave us special passes meant for journalists to work under curfew. And then he played a video for us that had just been delivered to the office – it was from three suicide attackers, among them the one that had just blown himself up at the Imambargah. They warned of more attacks against Shias. We discussed what to do. Should we carry the message in the video? We called up Inspector General Police Shoaib Suddle instead and gave him the video. The next day, there was a call from LeJ. They wanted to know why we had passed on the video to the police instead of playing it. "This will not stop us but your action can cost you dearly," the caller said.

When the curfew was relaxed the next day, a letter came from LeJ in my name, a threat on plain paper torn from a writing pad. In reporting the suicide bombing, we had used the word *shaheed* (martyrs) for the Shias killed in the attack. The letter wanted to know why? The LeJ spokesman warned that the reporters should not use the word *shaheed* for Shias killed in attacks otherwise "you like other reporters will be treated as *kafir* (infidel) and punished with death."

Meanwhile the Military Intelligence (MI) had gotten hold of the suicide tape from the police. The trouble started when some days after the bombing, the MI raided a doctor's clinic and arrested five people, among them a doctor who masterminded the suicide attack on the Imambargah. I did the story which came to us from the intelligence agencies behind the raid. After two days, the doctor's brother turned up at the office. He wanted to see me. I wasn't there at the time. He waited with a senior colleague of mine. When I arrived at the office, he said: "This is Rana. He did the story."

The doctor's brother was a young man with a thin beard. We shook hands and he said nonchalantly, "If we can blow up an Imambargah on a busy road, we can easily take you out – you are not a hard target." I asked him why? He simply said, "Tell me where's my brother?" He was obviously under the impression that if I knew details of the raid, I must know his brother's whereabouts. My colleague and I tried to convince him we were only doing our job. In the end, he asked for my phone number and left. Ever since that meeting, the LeJ has been calling me on my phone to give me details of target killings and bombings. I had been too afraid to refuse. Once I mentioned the name of their spokesperson incomplete – Ali Sher instead of Ali Sher Haideri. He called and said you did it on purpose and we can kill you for it. That night when I went home, my stress showed. My wife said the next time the LeJ people called, tell them not to call you but the police or just send their story to the newspaper office. She pleaded for me to be safe.

The year 2012 was the worst. There was an alarming rise in attacks on the Shia community. Every time they would attack, the LeJ would call me to give me the news. And then they attacked the house of a deputy inspector general of police of operations Wazir Khan Nasir. The family survived the attack but the house was destroyed. LeJ called to claim responsibility. *Mashriq* carried the story. I then got a call from an inspector general police who wanted to know why we had carried the story. He said the police could lock me up for three years for the story. I said LeJ would kill me if I don't do the story. 'Leave the job then', he said.

The police and intelligence agencies started harassing me to ask the LeJ spokesperson to meet me in person instead of calling me – presumably so they could arrest him. The IG police threatened reporters that a police case would be registered against them for having connections with LeJ. I

was summoned to the office of an intelligence agency where an official showed me the identity card of Abu Bakar Siddiq, the LeJ spokesman, while hiding his real name. He interrogated me to know the purpose of my meeting with Abu Bakar. The next day, I received a call from the LeJ spokesman who grilled me about my secret meeting with the official of the intelligence agency. It really shook me. I realized that I was under surveillance from all these agencies – the police, the banned groups and the intelligence agencies. That night, I couldn't sleep a wink. I feared for myself and my family.

When the Balochistan High Court ordered the local newspapers not to carry stories of banned outfits, principally LeJ, its spokesman offered his organization's services to protect journalists from police, other law enforcing agencies and even courts. At other times, Abu Bakar, the LeJ spokesman, said it was better to embrace martyrdom with a single bullet for a cause than to follow the high court's order.

Soon after that, the LeJ targeted a bus full of Shia pilgrims in Mastung. The spokesman called to give me the story. I told him about the meeting with IG police and his threat to put me in jail for three years. Abu Bakar hung up the phone only to call back later. He said take down the story and after he had dictated it, he said you are one of the few journalists we know. It doesn't matter what the IG or the police says. "It is best to accept a day of shahadat (martyrdom) than to go to jail for three years," he said and hung up the phone.

Tea with the khakis

Irfan Saeed

Reporter, Balochistan

I'm a journalist based in Balochistan, a boiling cauldron of militancy, insurgency, enforced disappearances, sectarian killings and ethnic divisions. With a career spanning about 25 years, I have seen it all in the course of duty. Once I ran into the spokesperson for Jam Yousaf who was the chief minister when General Pervez Musharraf was ruling the country, in a bookshop in Quetta. He took me aside and said, "Son, you have taken a great risk. I was at a high level meeting with the governor where your story was discussed. There were questions about your loyalty to the state. I had a hard time convincing everyone that you were only doing your job."

This was 2005. The Musharraf government had arrested Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri in 2001 on charges of murdering Justice Nawaz Marri. His sons were named in the case registered with police. They were on the run, escaping abroad or to the mountains. The Nawab said the case was faked to browbeat into submission the nationalists who had called for insurgency against the center's refusal to entertain Balochistan's demand for autonomy.

It was a time when doing a story about the Marri family was tantamount to red-ragging the bull because they were declared anti-state. Again, with the Nawab in jail and his sons disappearing, there was no one to speak to. Amidst all this I got a call from someone I knew in London. He said the Pakistani media had given Baloch leadership a short shrift and perhaps I could speak to Harbiyar Marri (Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri's younger son who got away to UK) and release the story on *Online*, the news agency I worked for at the time. My contact in London said he could arrange for an interview with Harbiyar if I thought it was a good idea for a story.

I naturally thought it was. I spoke to my editor who said it was newsworthy, so why not?

Soon after, Harbiyar called. He criticized the authorities, said the case against his family was fiction and spoke about the Baloch grievances

against the state. I carried his statement. At the time, it was the first instance of Pakistani media covering views of a Baloch leader in exile and a son of Nawab Marri's.

The story helped build trust between *Online* and the Baloch leadership in exile. They kept sending us statements to release from the news agency. Next Harbiyar introduced me to Balach Marri, his elder brother who was leading the insurgency on ground, in the tribal areas of Balochistan. Balach was later killed in a military operation. Balach called one day to invite me to Kahaan, the tribal town from where he led the insurgency. He said, "Come see for yourself why we are fighting." He said I'll be the first to visit them because the no one else from the media is allowed to document the insurgency.

It was 2005 when I went to Kahaan in Kohlu, the stronghold of Marri tribesmen. I stayed for two days among them. I did stories, took pictures. I asked them why they had picked up arms and they said it wasn't against anyone but to protect their lands against outsiders. They showed me helipads from the military operations against the Baloch uprising back in 1970s. We have oil and gas, they said, and we don't want outsiders to exploit and control our resources. When I came back, I sent pictures of tribal fighters in the mountains to AFP and Reuters. Pakistan's leading newspapers picked the stories and pictures from *Online*. It was the top story of the day for several news networks. When the story came out, my friends and colleagues cautioned me saying I had done a great story but a 'dangerous' one.

And then came the calls. A stream of them. The callers asked why did I go, how did I go and did I know doing the story was against the state? Even as I tried to comprehend the nature of these calls, I met the chief minister's spokesman in the bookshop and he reinforced my fears. Soon after came the summons from the cantonment. I was invited to tea with the Inter Services Public Relations, ISPR, the military's public relations arm. I went to see the officer who had called and over tea, he said some people want to meet me. It turned out they were not one but some officers waiting to speak to me. It seemed like a planned interview. They started questioning me – how much money was I paid to do the story? I didn't like the way they were treating me, saying things like "You know what can happen to you for reporting against the state?" "What is the nature of your relationship with the insurgents?" "Why did you go with them – you

knew they are against the state?”

There was a map of Kahaan on the wall. An officer gave me a laser light to point out where in Kahaan I had been. I said I had only been to places mentioned in the stories. I said I don't know the geography of the place. I only went where Balach's convoy went. I said why not ask the paramilitary that were there at the fort in Kahaan and the checkpoints that let us in and out of the town without stopping us. I was only doing my job.

After that meeting with ISPR, I was under observation for a long time. My phone calls were tapped and unknown callers would question me about conversations I have had on the phone.

The spokesperson of the chief minister helped a lot. I don't know what I would have done without him. The intelligence agencies had marked me. He went out of his way to convince them that I only did my job as a journalist. Whenever he would meet me he would mention that he had saved my skin else they were going to sort me out for the story on Balach and his men fighting in the mountains.

Killed reporting terrorism in the border regions

Janullah Hashimzada
Reporter, Afghanistan

Afghan Journalist Janullah Hashimzada was killed by unidentified assailants in August 2009 when he was on his way to Peshawar from Torkham on the Pak-Afghan border. The Peshawar-based Hashimzada was working for some foreign news organizations besides private Afghan television network *Shamshad*. Like many other journalists in the region he also fell prey in the line of duty reporting about terrorism.

Janullah was a thorough professional having rich and reliable sources of information both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He always did justice to his job and never succumbed to any pressure. I knew him from the time of the Afghan War when he was working with Pashto daily *Wahdat*. However, after 9/11 we became closer and he often used to discuss with me the threats he was receiving from time to time. By that time he had left the *Wahdat* and was working for *AP, CNN and Al-Arabia* television along with *Shamshad* TV. Janullah had close contacts and relations with many Afghan groups, warlords and even with Arabs as he could speak Arabic as well and was a religious minded man.

As per my knowledge he had no threats from militants as from the Afghan War time he had close contacts with warlords and even Taliban. His news stories would also be balanced and objective, which is why he was not controversial. However, the intelligence agencies in both Pakistan and Afghanistan were not happy with him. Since he used to share with me his thoughts he was afraid of the agencies that often chased him. I still remember the day when he had to take shelter in my office when some agency sleuths chased him. He was intercepted on many occasions which cautioned him to take care.

Although Janullah was not member of Peshawar Press Club or Khyber Union of Journalists he was popular among the journalists' community. I always found him a committed professional guy having rich sources and

knowledge about the Afghan affairs. His analysis would also be based on facts and arguments. He had no bias towards warlords and groups and reported facts. Belonging to Bathi Kot in Jalalabad, Janullah had shifted to Peshawar during the Afghan War and for some time lived at Shamshatoo Refugee Camp before shifting to Peshawar. In his mid-40s, he was a soft-spoken person who never hurt his colleagues and always kept his profession above all other considerations.

Janullah was careful about his movement. That's why he was traveling by public transport instead of his own car when he was killed in Khyber Agency while on way to Peshawar. He left behind a widow and four daughters but no government, Pakistan or Afghanistan, compensated the victim family, though *Al-Arabia* TV and CNN provided some compensation to his family. His elder brother took the responsibility of look after his daughters.

Unfortunately no serious efforts were ever taken to investigate Janullah's murder and bring to justice the culprits. The case went to cold storage after the routine preliminary reports of investigations by the political administration of Khyber Agency. Neither the Pakistani nor Afghan government was interested in the investigation and like that of many other journalists the murder case of Janullah has also been shelved. May he rest in peace.

Recounted by Shamim Shahid, a senior journalist based in Peshawar. His own testimonial also appears in this publication.

25 days in captivity

Javed Afridi

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On September 24, 2008 I was on my way home after duty at *The News daily* in Peshawar. I normally get my work done at around 9pm and skip away. My desire to leave even earlier that day was a military operation in Darra Adamkhel on the outskirts of Peshawar, which rendered the Indus Highway deserted. My family house is located midway between Darra and Peshawar and almost everyday mine is usually the only vehicle on that road at that time of the night. This night, I received a call from a neighbor warning me of some armed people in our locality. I called home and instructed my family to keep all doors locked and that I would call again to ask for the door to be opened once I was close to home. I informed my shift in-charge about the scenario and left.

I had driven for about 20 minutes and was making my way through the village when I found myself stopped by some armed people near my house. First I thought them to be members of the village committee but realized they were masked. Before I could make decide what to do, one of them fired at my car. The bullet went through the windscreen and exited through the window mirror to my left. Terrified, my blood freezing, I stopped the car immediately. After a body-search, they directed me to give them a ride and drop them to a nearby place. I told them to take my car and let me go. But pointing AK47s at me, they claimed they had nothing to do with me or my car.

They made me drive through some unfamiliar routes for probably 20 minutes and when we stopped, they blindfolded me and tied my hands behind my back. I heard them decide that two of the guys will take my car to some place and the rest will take me to their hideout. We walked for over two hours before we entered a room, where they removed my blindfold. They themselves had their faces covered. I was kept there for 24 hours during which they asked me several questions about me, my family and income. Next night, I was shifted to another place where I was kept for a total of 24 days. I could write a book about those 24 days in captivity! What I did during this period was to make them trust me as much as possible. I was obedient, soft spoken and pretended to be least

concerned about what was happening around me. I would avoid eye contact, never attempt to look at their faces or try to see beyond the room, when they entered or left it. I did everything to make them think that attempting an escape was the last thing they should expect from me.

But it was sheer trauma for me and something that I would not even wish for my worst enemy. Of the 25 days in captivity, the first seven and the last three were the worst when they were rude and rough with me. The initial trauma ended when they made me talk to my mother on the seventh day on the phone. Miraculously I managed to escape on the 25th day.

A brush with a proclaimed offender

Javed Shah

Reporter, Sindh

When you are a reporter you never really know how your story will be perceived by someone. In my career so far, I have faced threats from a whole lot of people. Sometime it is the police, sometimes the landlords, a revenue officer here, an ‘influential’ there; phone calls from powerful people who are angry about something or the other. All a part of the journalist’s life for me.

But that phone call, for some reason, was the scariest one I’ve ever received. I was sitting in Larkana Press Club. It was an otherwise unremarkable day. I had filed a routine story and wasn’t particularly worried about any I had filed recently. When my cell phone rang, I looked at the unknown number, then shrugged and picked it up. “Hello...?” “Javed Shah?” someone said. I could hear the anger in the voice. “Yes...?” “Aslam Chandio *bol raha hoon.*” The caller identified himself, and the aggression in the voice suddenly registered.

Aslam Chandio! The same Aslam Chandio who was wanted by the police back then; the same for whom they are offering a bounty of a million rupees. “*Ji, ji..*” I stammered, unable to understand why someone like him would call me. “You have written against us. Your paper has carried a report against us. Do not think that you will not be punished for this?” the gangster thundered, his pitch of his voice becoming darker. “What?” I was confused. Then it came to me in a flash. A recent story I had done on tribal feuds. Was it possible that he had taken offense to a story that mentions his tribe?

“I’ve never written anything against you. The story on tribal feuds was just a general report, it wasn’t meant to be about you at all,” I mustered. We had exchanged barely a few sentences and it was already getting difficult for me to remain coherent. “Do you think we are cowards? Or weak? Get ready to face the consequences now.” He was positively

shouting in anger now. I felt my throat run dry in fear and noticed the tremor in my hands. I was scared, very scared. I looked around the press club, embarrassed that someone might see me in this state. Trying to talk to him, I inched towards the stairs and rushed to the press club's roof. I didn't want my fellow journalists to see or hear me then.

For the first time, I was pleading for my life. I now knew that he was angry about the tribal feuds story and so I tried to convince him that it wasn't about him at all. I told him I never meant for it to be against anyone, that it was a general story. He wasn't convinced and continued to threaten dire consequences. Then I asked him to give his statement and told him that I will get his version of the story published. However, he wasn't interested, his threats continued and I begged him to stop. I tried dropping references to people who were close to him and asked him to talk to them about me, hoping that they'd vouch for the fact that I had not targeted anyone. It didn't seem to work.

"You have given more importance to our tribal rivals" he said. "Get ready to face the consequences. We are not going to let you go unpunished." The phone went dead. I stood there, on the roof of the press club, totally confused and worried. I still couldn't understand what had ticked him off so badly.

A few days went by. I had limited my movement and was thinking of moving my family to Karachi from Larkana. I lived in fear of being targeted anyway. Then, a few journalist friends intervened and gave me moral support. They explored a few connections that led a trail to the gang and somehow arranged to talk to the gangleader, the *sardar* of the dacoits in the region. They negotiated on my behalf and told me not to worry.

Thankfully, nothing has happened since. I haven't been contacted since by Chandio nor has he tried to get me. But even now, I regularly catch myself looking over my shoulder, afraid that at any moment, the notorious *ishtehari-proclaimed offender* – willspring out to nab me and deliver on his promise of violence.

Running for dear life

Saeed Ahsan*

Camerman / Reporter, Sindh

What is running for dear life? That I found in Tando Mohammad Mir. Even though I could feel the blood oozing from the bullet wound, I realized, you don't think about petty stuff like that when your life is at stake. So I ran hard. Running was the only option I had. There were about 70 of them. I could imagine their ravaged expression, their bloodshot eyes. Some of them were wielding sticks, others stones. But I'm sure that the bullet was fired from the house where I had just shot illegal activities, video evidence of which I had in my camera. I clutched it tightly and reminded myself to run even faster.

I thought as I sprinted if I reached the police mobile parked at the corner, I'd be safe. But my assumption proved wrong. When the police saw the angered mob running after me, they jumped off the mobile and ran themselves. So much for the police duty of helping someone in peril. I tried to yell for help but to no avail. I knew that jumping into the empty mobile wouldn't be of much help. But by then, I didn't have the energy to run any further. So I got into the mobile, desperately tried to hide myself between the ragged seats and waited for the mob to catch up. These were the most horrific moments of my life. You don't want to get in the way of a mob baying for your blood.

The local reporter who had scoped the area for us had told us that there were young girls at the drug and prostitution hub we were going to visit with the police, but nothing in his briefing gave us the impression that there would be dozens of armed men present. We had stopped at Hyderabad Press Club on the way and none of the local reporters seemed especially concerned. Certainly, nobody told us to take any safety precautions. Since we had arranged for a police escort, we weren't worried at all. We thought we'd go in, shoot and come back. It was to be a routine shoot.

When we reached the spot, officers of the local police present were already there in a weather beaten mobile. Only two were in uniform, the rest were in civvies. One of the uniformed policemen greeted us and

asked our host Sattar* to come aside. We thought that it would be a usual briefing. However when Sattar returned he looked wary. The police officer had asked him not to shoot inside the house as it could turn dangerous. He wanted us to restrict our film making outside. He said there were multiple armed men inside the house and trying to shoot it from within could turn dangerous and easily become bloody. I now kick myself. I really should have known better, but the excitement of being able to shoot inside the drug and prostitution hub had made me oblivious to danger. "Let's just go inside and see what happens!" I said. "If it really is dangerous, we can always leave. But leaving without even trying is not smart. We have traveled this far after all. How can we go back with just the visuals of some boundary walls?" I urged my team. Sattar nodded in support and went back to argue with the police officer.

With the police reluctantly on board, I handled over the microphone to Sattar and switched on my camera. Sattar would have knocked at the door but we saw that the latch was open. We softly stepped inside. There were a few seconds of silence and then all hell broke loose. There were about 10 women seated on the floor of the room. As soon as they saw us, they scrambled to hide their faces. "Turn it off, stop it", one yelled. Another started screaming, "Sajawal, Sajawal, the TV-wallas are here. Police is here. Sajawal, throw them out." She kept yelling.

Alarmed, we reflexively started moving back. Sattar pointed towards a door that had burst open. I saw two tall but well-built men rushing towards us. Both held gleaming pistols in their hands. "Sattar, Sattar get out of here. They have guns," I shouted. We tried to run back but they were immediately upon us. "How dare you come inside? Hand over this camera!" One of the men reached over and snatched the microphone from Sattar. "There is nothing on this camera, nothing at all," I blabbered weakly.

Unprintable curses were let loose upon us. Around 10 men came out of the same door. A group of women were behind them with a bunch of young girls. They all were covering their faces and ran towards the outer door. We were now surrounded by nearly a dozen men who all had the appearance of thugs, and seemed suspiciously intoxicated but agitated. Sattar was trying to convince them that we had set out to go elsewhere. He was trying to convince them to let us go.

Suddenly someone yelled, “Take out the reel from the camera”. My cameraman’s instincts responded before I could think. I clutched more desperately at the camera saying “*Bolana kuch nahi hai*. We are leaving, let us go,” I moved towards the door purposefully. This wasn’t a smart move. Suddenly all of them were over me, trying to snatch the camera. Sattar tried to help but some of them dragged him away from me and he was thrown out of the door. I was now all alone against those men. I was still trying foolishly to save my camera. I fought off the blind kicks and punches and finally managed to break the circle. And then I ran like crazy.

Once outside, I saw that Sattar was now surrounded by a mob of men. As I ran out of the house, their focus turned to my camera and they started coming after me. I added more speed to my steps. In the police mobile, I had waited for the inevitable. The mob entered and started beating me. I soon lost consciousness. I woke up hours later in a private hospital in Hyderabad. Sattar was by my side. “Thank God you are okay,” he said when I woke up. “I’ve told your family.” “Is the camera okay?” I asked. “Are you mad?” Sattar said.

Of course we couldn’t record a program that day. But then the channel aired the news of our injuries. The inspector general of Sindh took notice of the report and the deputy superintendent and station house officer of the region were suspended and an inquiry dutifully ordered. A case was registered and a few political statements were issued. Journalists from Hyderabad Press Club held a protest to show solidarity.

A few weeks after that incident, I had the chance to talk to a cameraman from Hyderabad. I asked him what happened to the criminal’s hub. “When the guardians of the law work hand in glove with the lawbreakers, how can anything change?” he said and started laughing. “It doesn’t matter however much noise you make, it won’t change a thing. And yes, over here, it is just more of the same every day. Everything is just the same. Ha, ha, ha! And so it will remain.”

** The names have been changed, upon request, for security reasons.*

Wishing for natural deaths, not by bullets

Khalilur Rehman
Editor, Balochistan

I'm working as the resident editor of daily *Jang* Quetta edition. I joined the newspaper as assistant sub-editor in 1974. I was asked to take over as resident editor in 2011 after the sudden death of my predecessor Akhtar Mirza who died of a cardiac arrest due to extreme pressure and threats from militant organizations, religious parties and nationalist students' organizations. Over the years, facing day to day pressure by various groups that want to coax us journalists to get desired coverage, mostly on front page, is a way of life for us. During my four decades on the Newsdesk I have gone through many a bitter experience dealing with these groups.

As a human being I feel fear in the wake of circumstances around me. Once my daughter while feeling the sensitivity of my job asked me "Abbu why don't you quit your dangerous job?" I told her about my work and why it was important and she understood. Once a militant group made a big issue out of us not publishing its leader's photo along with the story. It took us a week of daily engagement with them to convince them it wasn't done out of malice. We still had to publish the photo under pressure, to preempt any act of hostility that would harm one of our staff members.

In Balochistan even in the best of times journalists both in the field and in the Newsroom are in fact working between life and death situations keeping balance between two opposite sides under duress circumstances, feeling threats and fear. Intimidating phone calls are routine. Groups want us not only to publish their statements and press releases ad verbatim but often also warn us against publishing anything at all from their rivals. How do you juggle such pressure? Compounding matters is an order [by the Balochistan High Court] against publication and broadcast of statements and press released from banned organizations. The banned organizations pressure us the most. What do you do?

Look at the case of my predecessor, the respected late Akhtar Mirza who never had a disease in his life but died of a heart attack brought to bear by these pressures and daily threats by these myriad groups in the province. Once our former Editor Majeed Asghar – who now works in the same newspaper’s Rawalpindi office – and was the predecessor of late Akhtar Mirza escaped an armed attack on him that instilled deep fear among the newspaper staff. The bullet missed him and hit his driver in the moving vehicle. Such is the life of an editor and his staff at newspapers in Balochistan. Not too glamorous, is it?

Yes, it would appear we have surrendered before these organizations that employ violence to virtually dictate news agendas, particularly political wings of parties and sectarian militant groups. The result? All TV channels provide them live coverage and newspapers provide space to even ordinary statements issued by them on front and back pages, so yes, we have also succumbed to their pressure and threats. When we look at our families, we do not dare to think of opposing these groups. If we do, they can “sort us out” without any difficulty. We’re all human beings and it is natural to desire that we die of natural causes than by the hands of trigger-happy militants that even the state cannot seemingly counter. We’re just newsmen.

Breaking up breaking news

Saifur Rehman (Late)
Reporter, Balochistan

Young Saifur Rehman was among those unfortunate persons who became victims of a follow-up bombing on Alamdar Road in Quetta, Balochistan on January 10, 2013. He had hardly been six years in journalism, the profession he pursued formally since he moved to the city after his wife, a teacher by profession, was transferred from Panjgur district in the province. He began his career with daily *Asaap* in 2006 as a reporter in Quetta. He switched to electronic media joining *News One* channel in 2007 where he would polish himself professionally but was rewarded little for his work with financial benefits. With great passion for the profession, Rehman made it to *Samaa News* channel. Born in Lyari in Karachi, Rehman left behind three sons and a widow to mourn his untimely death for journalism.

Jalal Noorzai, bureau chief of Samaa TV in Quetta and Rehman's supervisor recounts the late journalist's life: "We shortened his name to Saif. He was brave and never gave an impression that situation surrounding him – the violence he had to report on all around us – had any effect on his morale. You know it is not easy to live and work in Quetta as the security situation over the past few years has gone from bad to worse. But Saif was still interested in doing crime reporting. He was a master in building relationships with politicians, senior police officials and thus becoming a well-connected journalist, something not every journalist manages to do.

The last time I had a face-to-face meeting with Saif was in Bacha Khan Chowk in Quetta where a bomb explosion left dozens killed on January 10, 2013. I was on the spot while Saif and cameraman Muhammad Imran Sheikh were covering the hospital where the wounded were being treated. I called Saif to come to Bacha Khan Chowk to discuss professional matters. Later in the evening, I informed Saif that an explosion had been heard in the city, which turned out to be a bombing on Alamdar Road targeting the Hazara Shia community the same day.

I firmly remember reminding both Saif and Imran to keep a distance

between themselves and ground zero. I have noticed when blast takes place and TV crews takes time in organizing themselves before leaving for spot coverage. But that evening it appeared as if everything was made ready for the crew – all members were in office and equipment also ready, suggesting as if we all knew something was going to happen in the evening. I still wonder why the crew members were all in office that evening and their equipment ready. If only there had been a delay in organizing the crew, it may have helped my men reach the spot after the second blast rather than just before it.

The crew left for the spot and I headed towards the hospital to wait for incoming wounded persons. I received a call from satellite engineer Jameel Ahmed who told me of the second blast. Quetta city was deserted minutes after the blast in Bacha Khan Chowk and traffic was off the road. Since the roads, usually experiencing bumper-to-bumper traffic in the city, were empty and our crew reached the sport in no time. Alas, they made it in time to become victims of the follow-up bombing.”

Shahid Rind, *ARY NewsTV* bureau chief in Quetta and close friend of late Saifur Rehman remembers him: “When Saif was being interviewed for Quetta office I don’t remember being too impressed by his credentials, as he was joining TV from a newspaper background. But then he proved to be a fast-learner. In one year he became indispensable for us and we became friends. In Baloch language an elder is affectionately called ‘Lala’ and Saif used to call me Lala.

The last time we had chat was two days before his martyrdom on the phone when he called me as I was boarding a plane for a visit out of country. Whenever something happened in the city, Saif used to be usually the first one from our side to reach the spot for coverage. When the first bombing took place on Alamdar Road, I advised ARY crew to move away from the spot immediately after making a minute-long footage. However, the real bombshell was the telephone call ARY cameraman made me saying Saif and cameraman Imran were exactly where the follow-up bomb went off. My heart sank. I rushed out to find them and it took us two hours to find his body, which was badly mutilated. This is too high a price to pay for your passion.”

Irshad Mastoi, Quetta-based journalist and close friend of late Saifur Rehman remembers: “I will never forget the care Saif provided me when I

had a mishap in Gwadar while covering the signing of the National Finance Commission Award in December 2009. I only then realized how humane and softie-at-heart he was. As long I was in hospital in Karachi for the treatment, he used to come to comfort me while bringing me food and cigarettes. Saif successfully helped me ward off depression. I always worried about his restlessness and when he used to rush to ground zero for coverage of bombings and attacks. He did the same January 10, 2013. I nearly fainted seeing his dead body in the hospital. I bitterly wished I could have saved him as he saved me. I curse this culture of breaking news that pushes some people to place their stories ahead of their lives.”

The cost of coverage of political unrest

MD Umrani

Reporter, Sindh

In a democracy as unstable as Pakistan's, violence during elections is accepted as the norm. The most recent general elections in 2013 resulted in several deaths across Pakistan. A journalist covering a political meeting also became a victim of election related violence. The amount of violence this time has been disturbing but, sadly, the violent trends are by no means new. While the general elections seem to be a call for widespread, mass violence, the ensuing by-elections held during the assemblies' tenure also have their fill of violent incidents. If not terrorism, intimidation of voters through savory and unsavory means is common. Thus when the first signs of unrest appeared in Oosta Mohammad, Balochistan, we were not surprised.

The by-elections were for a provincial assembly seat in Balochistan. Pakistan Muslim League-N and Pakistan People's Party were contesting against each other. We all knew the elections were going to be tough as there wasn't a clear vote bank for either party and the contest was going to be bruising battle for votes. For the sake of my safety, I won't go into the specifics of exactly which party was involved in the incident that I am about to share.

The day before the elections were due, a party's provincial president, who was also a *sardar* of the Zehri tribe, brought dozens of armed men to Jacobabad, Sindh. Jacobabad is adjacent to Jafarabad of Balochistan, and the district where the elections were due. The tribal and political leader had brought dozens of men in eight black land cruisers. The journalists in Jacobabad realized these armed men would be driven to Jafarabad the next day for intimidation and coercion of the voters. It was obviously a great a story. But, we didn't know whether to cover it.

As evening fell, the armed men left the bungalow where they were staying and the landcruisers full of armed men started roaming around

Jacobabad in a show of force. This scared the townfolks. The police was contacted and started following the armed men around. However, they were linked to a powerful chief and were staying at the place of a powerful and influential man in Jacobabad, so the police couldn't immediately take any action. I called my cameraman and we left for the place where the police and the men were facing each other. When we got to the place the environment was tense. It was obvious that a bloody clash was more likely to happen than not. I asked my cameraman to start shooting. However, the recording did not go well with the miscreants.

We had barely started recording when the sardar's son, who was accompanying the miscreants, pointed his guards towards me. Suddenly, I found myself surrounded by men. I was dragged along the road and then they picked up and threw me around. The torture may not have lasted long but back then it seemed like a long time to me. I started losing my senses and thought of my children. I wondered what would happen to them if I died, I wondered if my organization would help me, them. After a while I blacked out.

After I fainted the men threw me on the road. I wasn't the only journalist there that day, but I was the only one who was beaten and tortured. My friends from the district union of journalists arranged for an ambulance and I was shifted to the district headquarter hospital. I remained under treatment for a whole month. In the hospital, I was visited by various political and civil society leaders. But the channel for which I was working, and for which I went there to shoot the story, did not even bother to air the news of my ordeal.

I often think of the singer Inayat Hussain Bhatti's famous song; "*Dunya matlab di o yar, matlab honda tay piyar kardi*". Yes, the world revolves around interests; it will love you only if it wants something from you. That day, as I lay in the hospital, going through unbearable pain, I bitterly thought that journalists practicing yellow journalism were perhaps better journalists in this country, because here writing and speaking the truth is a real crime. Now, before I file a story, I think about the consequences for myself, because I don't want my wife to become a widow or my children to grow up without a father. No story is worth my life. Or worth the media organization that doesn't care for its workers.

Brand a journalist and murder him

Mahmood Ahmad Afridi (Late)

Reporter, Balochistan

The principal seat of the erstwhile princely state of Kalat has become such a frightening place that after losing my professional mentor and close friend Mahmood Ahmad Afridi, I have decided to quit the profession. I worked for *Aaj TV*, *Wush TV*, and daily *Mashriq* for 20 years and I'm convinced I will meet the same fate while walking as my journalist friend.

Mahmood, the president Mir Ahmadyar Khan Kalat Press Club was gunned down by unknown persons on March 1, 2013. Militant group Baloch Liberation Army claimed the responsibility for his murder for allegedly working for intelligence agencies. My friend did no such thing. The members of the press club closed office for an indefinite period, stopped working for lack of security for journalists.

Mahmood and I would usually spend a great deal of time during the day together except at noon which we spent with our families. That unfortunate evening, I was at home when received a call on my mobile from a friend that Mahmood was seriously injured in an armed attack and had been shifted to the hospital. I rushed to the hospital and saw him lying on a table, in pain. And I thought what kind of reward had Kalat and Balochistan given to someone who may have been an outsider with a Pakhtun origin but his family had settled in Kalat dating back to the days that his grandfather joined the state service.

Mahmood remained a football player in the team of Kalat division and later a referee for years till 1985 when he joined journalism working for a local daily and then daily *Intikhab*, one of the largest circulated newspapers of Balochistan. We local journalists do not know why he had been killed. And we are unable to answer the only question of his family members, particularly his two sons why he had been killed.

Fear has pervaded among the local journalist community in the wake of gunning down of one of our colleagues and we think that after targeting journalists in neighboring district of Khuzdar where five local reporters have been killed in recent years, the militants of opposite sides are now turning their attention to Kalat.

Mahmood was the most careful of reporters and used to advise us that we should run our stories only after confirmation through relevant quarters besides avoiding sensationalism. His family is so dejected after his murder that they decided to migrate to Quetta, leaving decades-long family associations behind. Most of the time he and I used to spend together and I knew him intimately. He never had any relations with either paramilitary forces or with intelligence agencies, and certainly never with any banned group of nationalists or militants. They did a terrible thing by killing an honest, professional journalist who enriched our lives.

Recounted by Mohammed Anwar, a journalist based in Kalat in Balochistan.

The terror of being branded anti-state

Muhammad Arif

Reporter, Balochistan

I'm nearly 50, a father of seven, and work as a journalist working in the remote and severely under-developed Balochistan district of Kharan that borders Iran. After doing my schooling locally I did my graduation from University of Balochistan in Quetta. I started my professional career in 1988 by joining daily *Intikhab* from Hub the same year. Some years ago I also started working for Baloch news channel *Wush* TV. I hoped that I will be able to serve the poor people by highlighting their development-related/social issues but have slowly gotten disappointed experiencing the harsh attitude of security agencies while performing my duties as a journalist.

I have been dubbed as anti-state for providing coverage to separatist groups and have been implicated in false cases of rocket/armed attacks on security forces. Once dozens of personnel of a paramilitary force stormed my house, blindfolded me and threatened to kill me. Is this how journalists should be dealt with? I joined journalism with a passion, commitment and hope that have been dashed. I provided coverage to both government and nationalist groups for acts in public domain as I am, and for that matter any journalist, supposed to do. I have been covering Independence Day celebrations as well as giving news about the activities of nationalists. So why the charges of being anti-state?

I have been harassed by security personnel in plainclothes on one pretext or the other. In July 2012, I was returning home from bazaar when two motorcycle riders with covered faces chased me. I managed to enter my in the nick of time. I was so scared that I could not sleep for the whole night and did not go out for several days. I was nominated in a police FIR along with 11 others for armed attack on Frontier Corps personnel on August 15, 2012. I'm a journalist, not a militant. After a week my name was included along with five others in a case of two rocket attacks on the camp of a paramilitary force in Kharan. I was able to prove

my innocence in the Anti-Terrorist Court Khuzdar, which acquitted me.

However, the security forces did not stop their vengeful actions. In February 2013 one day at 8.15 am, the personnel of security forces stormed my house, blindfolded me and roughed me up physically. I was then taken outside the house and made to stand before their officers who used filthy and derogatory language against my family and me. I was then tortured and branded as anti-Pakistan for which they said the minimum punishment is death.

I was threatened that I will face the consequences. The two desktop computers, a movie camera and a file carrying my matriculation, intermediate and graduation degrees were taken away. My son Raza Rabbani helps me as a cameraman as I cannot afford to hire anyone for the job because I do not get a single penny from my organizations. Although I do not want to quit the profession, despite my family pressure, fear always looms over large in my daily life.

Forced into taking the sting off reporting to survive

Mujeebur Rehman Angar
Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

I'm perhaps among the few Afghan journalists still working in Pakistan after the US-led coalition pulled down the government of ultra-conservative Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. I have been living in Pakistan since I migrated with family in 1980 – a year after the Red Army of the former Soviet Union invaded my country. I was born in 1967 near Kabul. My foray into journalism was by chance. I was bed-ridden for six months on doctors' advice when I stumbled upon the website www.tolafghan.com and started writing for it. I then joined a Peshawar-based radio production project where I worked for three years before joining Kabul-based Afghan news agency Pajhwok as its correspondent in Peshawar besides contributing to *Ulfat* and *Afaq* magazines. Since then I have gone on to work for other media organizations.

In the line of my work I have faced a number of difficult situations. Once I kept receiving calls intermittently on my phone from a certain caller for nearly six months in 2012. "You are not heeding our warnings and now get ready for the consequences," he finally said one day, his voiced laced with menace. I asked for a meeting to sort out any misunderstandings. "We have waited too long. You did not change and your time is over now." This terrified me. He neither wanted to explain what wrong he thought I had committed nor was he giving me an opportunity to explain myself.

My own suspicion was that the caller was someone from the security or intelligence agencies trying to terrify me into quitting journalism. This was evident from the fact that the caller never pointed to a particular story that may have hurt their interests. "We don't need to explain to you. Better you read your own stories to know what you have done," is the closest he ever got to telling me. I have always been careful about my reporting and have never complained about or written against either Pakistan or its government and it was a mental torture trying to second

guess myself and imagine my own alleged crimes without knowing what they were.

At times I used to receive threatening calls telling me “your days are numbered” at 2am or 4am, waking me from sleep, perhaps to maximize psychological pressure on me. I contacted senior journalist colleagues in Peshawar and press freedom organizations such as Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) to document the threats. No help I could get managed to mitigate the threats. Pressure from family complicated things for me. They kept asking me to quit journalism and do something else, maybe business. Living with this situation impacted my professional work.

I did not surrender completely. I did try to stand up against this difficult situation. But to be honest, it affected my morale. I also informed my organization which merely advised me to “be careful.” When the threatening calls did not stop, the organization told me to stop work until further notice and to move to Islamabad for safety reasons. However, the organization refused to pay me if I relocated for safety and for the duration that I was not working. I faced serious financial issues as I was the lone bread-earner of the family.

In the end I stopped reporting about anything that would even remotely be considered as sensitive and focused on social and development oriented themes. As precautionary measures, I limited my movement and would not tell anyone when or where I would be moving. Because of this I also missed out on an opportunity to attend a training on safety for journalists that I had been invited to participate in. All this resulted in changing of the tone of the mysterious caller. The tone is no longer as threatening as it was in the beginning. But I do still receive a couple of calls a month. I think it is to let me know I’m still on their radar and to keep me in line. For safety’s sake, I have had to change both my behavior and my reporting. I still don’t feel safe but that’s the price I have to pay to keep clinging to journalism.

Exile and murder – the wages of being a journalist

Mukarram Khan (Late)

Reporter, Tribal Areas

I received a text message from MukarramKhan the night after he was killed. I had gone to bed in shock, struggling to come to terms with the terrible knowledge of his murder. I had called up common friends like I needed someone to tell me otherwise. To tell me it is not true. Healthy and strong as he was when I last saw him, as he always will be in the hearts of all who knew him. And in turn, I got calls from others. Those, who like me, sought protection from the horror in others who knew Mukarram, hoping against hope. And we had called Mukarram in a macabre attempt to confirm the terrible news from a dead man, hoping he will answer the phone to tell us he was really was okay, that it was all a bad joke. I didn't know anyone in his family to reach out to, now that he was no more.

It seemed all of us – colleagues, friends and acquaintances ambushed by a terrible loss – sought to make sense of a shock we couldn't comprehend. Even as we wanted to run away from the knowledge, we rushed to each other to fill the hollow Mukarram left with words we knew had no use but must be said because the void threatened to consume us. I went to bed after calling his phone, receiving no response, knowing he's gone. I lay numb with anger and loss, the horror of it curdled in my veins. Unwept and anguished, the sorrow stood by my bed for want of striking back, if only I knew who to strike at. Late that night, I woke to the ping of the phone. A message from Mukarram. Groggy and still thinking of him even as I woke to the sound of phone, I felt a strange relief wash over me on seeing his name. Here he was, texting to say he was fine, writing to say we got it all wrong. In the seconds before I opened the text, I thought the news of his murder was a nightmare I had.

The message, of course, was from someone using Mukarram's phone to send his contacts details of his funeral. The nightmare had persisted, seeping into reality, asking to be acknowledged, accepted. I pushed away

the phone, wondering if the irony of sending a message from a dead man to his friends had occurred to whoever sent it. Even if it made sense to do so to inform those Mukarram knew. There in the dead of the night, staring at the roof through the dark cloud of a knowledge driven home with cold finality, I wondered if someone among the list of his contacts had planned his murder or knew of it. Were they shocked to receive a text from a man whose vital, vigorous presence they had just obliterated? Had he come back from the grave because mere death cannot keep someone like Mukarram down?

It is unlikely, but not entirely. After all, a journalist of Mukarram's standing would have contacts and sources in Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. It is just that the sources are not available to journalists when they are needed or sought while covering a conflict as shadowy as that in federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) or in Balochistan.

The militants get upset with journalists for not carrying their version of the story but who do you call when you need to confirm or balance a story? It is always the militants calling the journalists out of nowhere to give their version of a story. When journalists need information from them, they don't know where to look. In 2007, Mukarram told me: "The armed groups are a hydra, they either have no spokespersons or everyone poses as one. They are constantly on the move and their locations are not known. How do you confirm the news or get their side of the story then?"

Another journalist from South Waziristan explains the kind of problems Mukarram faced while reporting conflict: "The success of military operations, reported by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), may be perceived as reporting the failure of armed groups, or the other way round. You have to triangulate news, and give the other party a chance to respond if you want to live to do another story." With the military giving events a spin of its own and the militants in hiding, who does one confirm information from? The militants and the military routinely call reporters to stop them from filing a story or to report their version but when reporters want to speak to them, they are either not available (in case of the military) or not willing to meet the reporter or untraceable (in case of the militants, that is, if a reporters know who to talk to).

When the Taliban killed Mukarram, they gave lack of coverage of their version of the story as the reason.

Before the militants killed him, they hounded Mukarram out of his home and village. In 2007, he shifted to Peshawar, leaving his home in the Mohmand Agency in FATA after receiving threats. He was among the pioneering journalists in FATA who took up journalism in 1990s, in the wake of Afghan Jihad that militarized the border regions. Like some of his contemporaries, he was also among the first journalists displaced from FATA for fear of threats from militants. He once said he was glad he had no children because he wouldn't have known what to do about their future and education given the circumstances he lived in. He hadn't returned to his home in his village till the day he died.

Intrepid as he was, Mukarram couldn't stay away from his beat, shifting back to Shabqadar on the periphery of Mohmand Agency from where he could quickly go in when duty called. His family wanted him to give up journalism because they couldn't take the stress of threats and displacement. He accepted the risks that come with his job but worried about his family's peace of mind. "When I go to report, I don't know if I'll be back safe," he said once when he was stuck at a friend's place after the roads closed down due to fighting between the Taliban and security forces. "My family has been calling me all evening to find out if I am safe. Every time I go out to report, I don't know if there will be a suicide attack, a shooting or a kidnapping." That didn't keep him from doing his job until the Taliban silenced him.

The Taliban spokesman said they had asked Mukarram to include their views in stories. Mukarram said the *Voice of America*, the news network he reported for, didn't entertain the militants' version. For militants to drag media into a war is reprehensible but I wonder why an international news network from a country that is a party to the conflict would risk the life of its correspondent by insisting on one-sided stories? Especially when there is all this international focus on safety trainings for journalists in FATA and Pakistan, training them to balance their stories to stay out of harm's way? The Taliban hit list, sent to the Tribal Union of Journalists with the demand to cancel the membership of journalists on the list, has several more journalists working for foreign media. While there is no condoning the ugly act of militants murdering the messenger,

there's little reckoning of how news organizations, foreign or local, expose their reporters to hazards through flouting principles of good, safe journalism.

The SMS message from Mukarram's phone announcing his funeral said he was martyred. Some consolation that - the title 'martyr' - to family and friends. How many of us have to accept (and hide behind) the empty solace of martyrdom as if violence that 'martyrs' people is justified, as if an exalted status in death is consolation enough for a terrible loss. And if martyrdom comes from dying for a cause, whose cause is sacred: Mukarram's or the militants'? And who in his profession or authority is honoring his cause? And what with, a deafening silence, spineless impunity that applauds murder, encourages it?

It is ironic that the word martyr that journalists like Mukarram avoided attentively in their reporting - because both military and the militants insisted they were martyrs to a cause and if a reporter dubs one as a martyr, the opponent becomes a villain - was affixed to his name in news of his murder. Hard as I try, I can't imagine Mukarram with the same title his murderers insist on.

Ever since the war came to Pakistan's tribal regions bordering Afghanistan, the journalists have been harassed by militants to use the word 'martyr', not 'killed', for militants dying in military operations. Bound by a sense of duty to nation and that indistinct, indefinite compulsion called the 'national interest,' journalists reported the soldiers dying in operations as 'martyrs.' Not sure if they could extend the same respect to militants, they initially reported the militants merely 'killed.' The militants, who claim to be fighting a just war, a Jihad, obviously want to go down as 'heroes' dying for a cause. The word martyr (*shaheed* in Urdu) bestows on the dead the religious title of dying with honor whereas mere 'killed' is seen as taking away the honor from armed groups fighting in FATA. They see their fighting as a struggle for an honorable, religious cause.

It was after threats from militants that journalists reporting on militancy were forced to rephrase 'killed.' They used *Jan Bahaq*, a neutral word, to remove a perceived bias - you are with the military if you label their dead martyrs and with the militants if you dub *them* martyrs. Mukarram Khan, who worked for *Dunya* TV and the *Voice of America's* Pashto service, told

me once: “If the headline says that soldiers have been ‘martyred’ and insurgents ‘killed’, you will have a visitor from the armed groups to give you a bit of ‘advice.’”

For months since Mukarram’s murder I have agonized over deleting his contact, now that he is no more. I have also agonized over the guilt that I may have had some little part to play in his death. Between 2005 and 2007 Mukarram and I worked on a radio project together. Having worked with print and TV before, it was the first time he received training to do radio journalism. He was very motivated and kept producing packages from Mohmand. Later, when he got the VOA opportunity, he was grateful that the radio training and experience helped him get the job. Among the batch of tribal journalists we first trained in radio journalism were Hayatullah, Noor Hakeem and Mukarram among others, all three of them killed. For now Mukarram’s contact stays in my phone. One of these days, I will delete it. Like I deleted the names of Hayatullah, Nasrullah, Hashim Zada and Noor Hakeem before him – all journalists I helped train and became friends with, and all who were killed in the line of duty. Brave, fatal gentlemen whose determination and sacrifice will inspire others to raise a voice for a region in ruins.

–Recounted by Aurangzaib Khan, a Peshawar-based senior journalist, writer, trainer and photographer.

Silenced – the journalist who barely slept

Musa Khankhel (Late)

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Military operation against militants in Pakistan’s northwest mountainous regions was in full swing in late 2008. Guns rattled and artillery roared at midnight as curfew restricted everyone to their home in Mingora in the scenic Swat Valley. He was also supposed to be indoors in order to avoid harm, but he sat awake atop the building of a local hotel. He wanted to stay sleepless to make sure he did not miss any news story that could have developed that night. It was not the first night he was going to spend sleepless, rather it was a routine for him to stay awake at nights to report any breaking news to Geo News, the TV channel he was reporting for.

Musa Khankhel actually was a journalist who lived for news and died in pursuit of it. The journalist, who also worked for English-language daily *The News*, was killed in Matta area when he was covering a ‘peace’ rally being led by local rabbleroising cleric Maulana Sufi Muhammad. That February 18, 2009 evening ended up anguishing the journalist community, and the people of Swat whose hopes for peace were dimmed by this incident. Musa was nationally a widely recognized reporter – working from a region that offered plenty to report about.

He would do two things, his brother Esa Khankhel says, reporting and daytime sleep. “He would spend sleepless nights. In the morning, he would go to bed at office and slumber for a few hours,” says Esa, also a journalist. According to him, the bachelor Musa would have gone home hardly for two or three nights for three years. And the reason was, he said, his hometown Swat had started to become volatile in 2006 and he had engaged himself in non-stop reporting. Musa’s home was just 15 minutes of walking distance from his office in Mingora.

Mehboob Ali, Musa’s colleague in Swat, remembers him as a devoted journalist. “Musa would reach the site of any incident even at 5 in the

morning. He worked day and night—non-stop,” he said. “Let me say that no journalist could beat him in breaking news. And I think that took his life. He sacrificed his life for his profession.” As a brother, he was dear to Esa. “He was more a friend than brother,” he says. Esa recalled Musa gave him pocket money every morning before leaving for school from 6th to 10th class. “It was him who groomed me into a journalist, initially without even letting me know,” he says. “When the situation in Swat deteriorated, he assigned me 50 per cent of the stories. I didn’t realize why he was making me work,” he said. “But actually he was training me.” Just a month before his murder, Esa recalls, he told me, “You must be able to do something in case I am not with you.” Musa’s friends say he was benevolent. When with friends, he would not let anybody else pay for anything. “It was understood, he was the responsible one,” a friend said.

Before he was killed, shot by armed men suspected to be terrorists, Musa sent his last story to *The News*. The slug of this super lead story read, “Last report by the slain journalist.” The day he was being lowered into the grave, his byline was on top of a super lead story of one of the popular English-language dailies of the country. Talk about commitment! Today, his journalist friends eulogize him as a hard working journalist and an even more thorough professional. “He was a pillar of journalism in Swat, and we miss him,” Mehboob says, misty eyed.

Like all those dozens of journalists killed in the line of duty before him, the perpetrators behind Musa’s murder have not been tracked down, let alone prosecuted, convicted or punished. All the anniversaries of his death, observed on February 18, have ended with the recurring demand for bringing the perpetrators to justice. It hasn’t been forthcoming.

—Recounted by Aurangzaib Khan, a Peshawar-based senior journalist, writer, trainer and photographer.

When patriotism of journalists is questioned

Tahir Rathore

Reporter, Islamabad

It was the dusty evening of October 12, 1999. I was editor of *NNI* news agency and busy overseeing a mammoth operation reporting Pakistan's latest military coup as it unfolded. This included the army chief, General Pervaiz Musharraf, refusing to accept his sacking, the army refusing to accept his replacement officer appointed by the head of government and the Prime Minister House being invaded by soldiers and arresting elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Three hours into the whirlwind coup as we frantically collected, confirmed and coalesced information into news reports – at around midnight – an Army captain with four soldiers carrying the automatic guns, entered the *NNI* head office in Blue Area Islamabad and ordered us to completely stop our work and banned us either transmitting or airing the news and also ordered that no one will use the telephone. As editor when I asked him the reason, he curtly barked, “Keep quite! You will know the reason shortly.”

He kept all of us hostage the entire night and only well into the morning at 8 am (Oct 13, 1999) did he let up. He did not give us any reason for holding us incommunicado at gunpoint. He harassed me and my other colleagues for almost 8 hours. I mustered courage and secretly spoke on the phone to some military officers as my reporting beat was defense. After my intervention, a senior military officer asked the captain to “let the people go.” Around 9 am the captain started questioning our reporters, sub-editors and staffers individually and let them go home one at a time. The news agency was not allowed to work for a full five days and we all worked from outside the office building to the newspapers and other media houses.

Fast forward to October 2013: I received a telephone call on the third of October. An Intelligence Bureau official was on the line and asked me visit their office in Islamabad. I inquired for what purpose? He replied: “My director wants to meet you.” I told him that if his director wishes to

meet me he can visit my *Samaa TV* Islamabad office. He insisted: "Please come, we don't want to use other means."

I decided to visit them after holding consultations with my office superiors and relevant journalists' union representatives. The gentleman wanted to know about my visits to Indian High Commission receptions and get-togethers in diplomats' houses. I told him that as part of my professional duties, I have to attend such functions and that I don't go functions hosted by the Indians but also diplomatic events held by other countries that have embassies in Islamabad. They kept haranguing me with silly but ominous questions. After three hours of humiliating interrogation I had enough. I told him, "I am a Pakistani and I don't need a certificate of my patriotism from any agency or person," and left his office.

In November 2010, I produced and broadcast a 90-second TV report on the "Khooni Chowk" in Swat where Taliban hung bodies of people they had killed. I received at least 10 telephonic threats from unknown numbers. They condemned me for declaring them terrorists and warned me against doing any further reporting. I took some security measures and stopped using my personal telephone for reporting purposes.

Firm in the face of fear

Rana Muhammad Azeem,
Reporter, Punjab

It was January 17, 2014 and I was in a meeting with colleagues in Lahore and discussing growing threats against journalists in the country when I got a call from Karachi from Amin Yousuf. He had bad news: three media workers of *Express* media group had been killed with Taliban taking responsibility. As we were discussing our response, the *Express News* TV channel took me online to relay my response as president of PFUJ. I condemned the attack and denounced the Taliban as '*Zaliman*'.

Minutes after the live beeper I received a call from a telephone number 0321-4613322. The caller said he was from the Taliban and that I should not have spoken out against them. He asked me to be ready for the bullet that had been 'chosen for you.' When a while later I received a another call, this time from a number 0092-5412945, with the speaker asking me to be ready to meet a bloody fate they scripted, I was stricken with fear. I called up high ranking officials in the police, intelligence and information ministry and informed them. I kept receiving calls from the second number that night but did not attend.

The next morning a protest call was issued by the Lahore Press Club against the attacks on our friends in Karachi and elsewhere and it was decided that we journalists would take a procession to Punjab Assembly. This was attended by legislators from Pakistan Muslim League-N, Pakistan People's Party, Tehrik Insaf Pakistan, as well as hundreds of journalists. I was leading the procession around 3pm amid angry slogans by journalists against the attackers when near Charing Cross I received a call. The caller said: "You shouldn't have taken out this rally. You are in our cross-hairs. We can see you where you are standing. Be ready to join your murdered journalists." I immediately informed the police officers present and they took me in a protective shield until our protest rally concluded. All this while I waited for a whizzing bullet to hit my head or heart. It was a terrible state to be in but I vowed not to flee.

The next day, January 19, 2014, the police traced the numbers to what

they claim were Taliban sources and registered a case against the banned militant group. I was advised to severely restrict my movements as a protective measure. On January 21, as I was playing with my young daughter and son at home along with my wife when I received a call from the 0093 (Afghanistan) code. The caller is menacing and angry. He says he is from the Taliban and that I should know they keep tabs on me – at what time and where I drop my daughter to school, the car I use and the routes I take to school and work. He said they had formally recognized me as an enemy of the Taliban and that I should be ready to pay the price for this.

The next day, January 22, the Taliban issue a fatwa with a list of Pakistani journalists that they declared as “anti-Taliban.” I find my name on the list. My heart sinks. Not because my name is there but because I remember from the night earlier that they threatened to hurt my children. This is enough to scare even the bravest among us. But our children should not be brought into this. I resolve not to be cowed down. Not because I’m not scared – which I am – but because if I’m selfish it would mean that as a leader of Pakistan’s journalists I have abdicated my responsibilities. Many of my journalist colleagues are facing the same threats and challenges. I am but one among many. As journalists we not only have to defend ourselves but also freedom of expression. We will continue to stand firm.

A picture worth a thousand threats

Naseer Ahmed

Photographer, Balochistan

I'm based in Quetta in Balochistan and have been working as a photographer for the *Reuters* wire agency for several years now. I have worked in a similar capacity for a string of local news agencies and newspapers, covering the conflict in Balochistan from the front bringing pictures worth a thousand words each. My endeavor for that exclusive photo has always created security problems for me. I have been fortunate enough to narrowly escape two suicide attacks in Quetta in 2010 although you never know when your luck will run out here.

There's one instance that caused me psychological trauma in the aftermath of publication in several newspapers of a photo I took of a leader of a banned outfit that prompted the militants to threaten to kill me. I had gone to cover an event at the Commissioner's Office in Quetta. When I parked my motorcycle I saw an armored vehicle backed by personnel of Anti-Terrorist Force. All people in the area were stopped and the man inside the armored vehicle was taken to the court room. I asked the ATF personnel deployed outside the Anti-Terrorism Court who he was. They whispered that he was the member of banned organization. I waited for no less than four hours to try and capture him on camera.

I positioned myself behind a tree, ready to photograph the prisoner. When he was brought out of the court, I clicked away rapidly. I managed to get five pictures that showed his face of which only one was a good one. For a captive his face was pretty relaxed and he seemed to exude nonchalance. I disappeared from the spot and called my bureau chief who spoke to the head of the news agency. We decided to run the photo but not to identify the prisoner by name. Next morning the photo was published in almost all newspapers. The judge issued notices to all newspapers for publishing the photo but no notice was issued to me.

The editors of the newspapers were called to explain that why the photo was published and publicity provided to an accused of the banned militant outfit. They pleaded that my wire service and I should also be implicated. The court promptly issued notices to me and my bureau chief. We responded to the summons and appeared before the judge who asked me why I had made the photo. Was it because someone from the banned organization had tipped me off? I denied it because that was the truth and emphasized that I just happened to be there when the prisoner was produced. "I will send you to jail," the judge warned me. He was concerned that the publicity had attracted the attention of militants and they would target him and his family for presiding over the case against the arrested militant. "If something happened to me or my family you will be responsible for it. I have already written to Civil Lines Police Station about you," the judge told me. I was quite disturbed at this unintended turn of events.

Maqbool Rana, a senior journalist attending the court came to my rescue. He explained to the judge that every photographer wanted to get exclusive photos and that in pursuit of the profession I had done nothing wrong, violated no laws and committed no contempt of court, and that the photo was taken outside the court, not inside it. He said if the judge was implying contempt of court, it should be done in written so that I could defend myself. The judge declined to do so and let me off with a caution. After the publication of my photo, the authorities stopped bringing the militant to court and instead the judge conducted the trial in jail.

About five months after the publication of the photo, one night I saw a car parked outside my house at 10 pm as I came back home from work. One of the four men in the car came out and asked if I was Naseer? Yes, I confirmed. They forced me into their car and I thought this was it; I would be killed. The men said because of my photo now bail is not being granted to their colleague. "You made that arrest public. Nobody is coming to the court as a witness. Who sent you to make the photo," they wanted to know. I explained to them that I had no mala fide intention and I just happened to be there. They warned me to be careful next time and never take or distribute a photo of their colleagues. I lay low and took precautions. I was traumatized by the whole experience and did not even tell my family to spare them the tension.

On the wrong side of militants, driven to death

Nasrullah Afridi (Late)

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Nasrullah Afridi, a reporter from the Tribal Areas but settled in Peshawar from where he reported, was publicly threatened by militants several times for not siding with them in coverage of events. His wife often pleaded to him to quit journalism for his own safety but he rejected it. "My father used to tell my mother: 'I may leave you but I will never leave journalism'," says Afridi's elder son, Ihsanullah 20. On May 10, 2011, Afridi was killed when a bomb planted under his car exploded in Khyber Super Market in the Cantonment area in Peshawar. He left behind his wife, three daughters and three sons to mourn.

Born in a conservative tribal family of retired police constable Zahir Khan in Shalober area of Bara tehsil in April 1973, he did matriculation in his hometown from Government High School Alamgudar, now demolished by militants. Nasrullah joined Urdu daily *Insaf* as correspondent in 2001 after he had done his master's in Pakistan Studies from University of Peshawar. Working later as a reporter for Urdu daily *Mashriq* and *PTV* from Bara, he had had an uneasy relationship with Khyber Agency-based banned outfit Lashkar-e-Islam (LI), led by warlord Mangal Bagh, who at one time operated an illegal FM radio operation, since its inception in 2006.

Tribal journalist Qazi Rauf who worked for Urdu daily *Express* from Bara narrates a threat he and Afridi jointly received from Lashkar on February 16, 2006. "Afridi and I reported the killing of an innocent person by militants who labeled the deceased as a thief to justify his murder. The story infuriated Mangal Bagh who through his radio broadcast threatened to demolish our houses if we did not stop reporting against Lashkar. The pressure was so great that we had to submit to local intermediation under which we submitted a surety bond of Rs1 million through a local elder and promised not to file stories about the group any more to evade Bagh's threat to have us killed."

Afridi, however, couldn't stay silent for good. His curiosity always led him to do investigative reporting – a risky and rare practice exercised by terrified and under-qualified journalists in the militancy hit tribal areas. On May 21, 2006, Nasrullah wrote a story for English daily *The News* stating that one of Mangal Bagh's sons was studying in a school run by the Frontier Corps inside Fortsalop Camp in Bara tehsil of Khyber Agency. The very next day Mangal Bagh through his illegal radio station asked his militants to shoot Afridi wherever they found him. Bagh closed Afridi's petrol station in Bara for three years, and banned sales of the *Mashriq* in Bara tehsil for six months. Sensing trouble, a few days later Afridi relocated his family from his hometown of Bara to Hayatabad neighborhood in Peshawar. A year later, on May 21, 2007, Afridi wrote a story alleging that Lashkar militants had fired on security forces in Qambarabad area, injuring a soldier. Lashkar rejected its involvement, and five days later a hand grenade was hurled into Afridi's house in Peshawar. Luckily his family remained unhurt.

Unlike his fellow journalists, Afridi was more than just an event reporter, who wrote articles and analyses on issues affecting tribal areas. He played an important role in establishing Bara Press Club and ran a campaign to oust the overwhelming majority of government teachers who moonlighted as journalists from the Tribal Union of Journalists that earned him more foes than friends. In 2009 some tribal journalists from Khyber reportedly met Mangal Bagh in Tirah Valley and complained against Afridi's "anti-Lashkar" writings and asked the warlord to use his influence to help make one of them a correspondent for *Mashriq* instead of Afridi so a more favorable coverage could be ensured for him. While this did not transpire, the pressure on Afridi ballooned.

Having fled his hometown in 2006 he remained under constant mental stress and did not dare return to Bara for fear of an attempt on his life by Lashkar. "Once he told me he could get a licensed arm for his protection but doubted it would be enough to safeguard him against the brutal militants if they wanted to kill him," says Asghar Khan, a journalist colleague of his from Bara. The threats to Afridi were well known to everyone in Bara. "Whenever I travelled with Nasrullah in his car, I used to inspect underneath the vehicle to check if a bomb had been attached. Each time Afridi used to laugh at me saying we won't die before our date fixed by fate," reveals Sohbat Khan, ex-agency councilor from Bara.

Lashkar had also been blaming Afridi for siding with its archrival militant outfit Ansarul Islam. The journalist's colleague Qazi Rauf disagrees with this, saying that though Afridi remained impartial while professionally dealing with the two outfits. A commander of Lashkar in on record complaining that Afridi was impartial in his writing on militancy but spoke against them in private and public meetings.

On April 17, 2011, during a press conference in Peshawar the leaders of Ansarul Islam claimed that Mangal Bagh had fled to Afghanistan where they alleged he was working for anti-Pakistani forces. This enraged Bagh who thought the press conference had been organized by Afridi, who was then president of Bara Press Club. He threatened and expressed anger over the press conference to Afridi through his shadow spokesman Muhammad Umer three week prior to his death, say Afridi's friends. Bagh's anger also stemmed from the fact that in the 2008 general election in Tribal Area's National Assembly electoral constituency NA-46, the voters and candidates were clearly divided in terms of their association with either Lashkar-e-Islam or Ansarul Islam. Afridi was one of the candidates who sought the support of Ansar but failed to achieve it. Later he withdrew from the competition to represent the region in parliament but by that time he had strengthened the impression that he was anti Lashkar.

Three weeks after the press conference, Afridi was killed as he opened his car, the bomb planted in the vehicle going off. No one claimed responsibility for his killing.

—Recounted by Aurangzaib Khan, a Peshawar-based senior journalist, writer, trainer and photographer.

A faked encounter with near-death

Naz Sahito

Reporter, Sindh

The shots were sudden. One second I was climbing up the stairs and then I was falling. I heard the gunshots and only then did I feel the blood oozing. I had been shot. Later I would find out that three bullets had hit me. But then, I only heard the police firing and felt the pain searing and blacked out. When I came to, I was in the hospital. The bullets had entered my arms and legs. I had fallen down the stairs on being hit and the resulting injuries put me on crutches for months.

This story dates back to the time when I was working with a newspaper called *Khadim-e-Watan*. The paper was running a series on social ills. We were filing stories on theft and crime daily, and strangely, along with the criminals, the police did not seem too happy about that. Then, there was a theft at a friend's place and I accompanied him to the police station to get the FIR registered. The police officer asked us to wait. Then he brought another officer and asked us to lead them to the crime scene. We started off with them and then something odd happened. Half way to my friends' home, the officers stopped and arrested a man calling him a suspect for the same theft. We were now supposed to take them along with the suspect to the crime scene.

Wondering about their unconventional behavior we led the way. I showed them the stairs and started climbing up. And then it happened. The police officers were suddenly shouting "*Pakro usko*, he is running away" and then I heard the shots. The police claimed to be firing at the suspect, but I became the target of the bullets and was hospitalized with three bullet wounds. For months the doctor treated me. Walking became painful and I had to use crutches. I didn't know then that these injuries were no accident. But as I suffered, I became frustrated. I thought about the unfairness of it all wondering why in this country criminals are allowed to roam free while the innocent suffer. I raged over the fact that the suspect had not been caught. Over time, as the police

kept putting off any investigations on the case, I came to realize that day I was the real target of those police officers. I found out that the so called 'suspect' was also one of their own planted men.

With help and support from a number of journalist friends, I started pressurizing the police and the administration. After a while, I succeeded in getting a case registered against the suspect policemen. As soon as the case was registered, the police started using usual coercive tactics to pressurize me. I started getting calls from higher ups and was contacted by multiple influential personalities. They started pleading, asking me to forgive the policemen.

We had decided to keep on the pressure till we got to the bottom of the whole affair. Finally, I was visited by the same policemen who had fired those shots. They were accompanied by local elders. They told me that the Station House Officer had asked them to shoot me; they were supposed to end my life in that encounter. Now, the same people who almost succeeded in eliminating me were begging for my forgiveness, swearing on the Quran that they were truly sorry.

I forgave them. My arm still hurts at times due to those bullet wounds. But I didn't leave journalism, nor did I stop writing the truth. But I've become much more careful in the context of adopting security measures.

The politics of violence

Raza ur Rehman

Editor, Balochistan

“Quit this job,” said the man menacingly on the telephone. His threatening tone took me by surprise. As far as I could tell I had done nothing wrong. Not something that the caller, a tribal political personality of much influence, as he turned out, could take umbrage to. The call came when I was in my office, monitoring news for the newspaper. The caller claimed he had been humiliated in a TV talk show. “Quit the job,” he warned again. “And that’s a favor I am doing you.” His gruff manner suggested he could do much worse, or maybe I deserved much worse, for the humiliation that my channel had purportedly brought to him.

It transpired there had been a TV show on *Express TV* in which anchorperson Kamran Shahid of the talkshow *Frontline* had reportedly lost control of a discussion between a supporter of the former military ruler Musharraf, blamed for killing of a Baloch leader, and the son of the slain leader. Musharraf’s supporter on the show used abusive language against the son who had demanded that Musharraf be arrested and tried for murder. (Musharraf, who was in self-exile in London at the time, has since been arrested in the murder case.)

“If you do not quit, I will close down your newspaper and take your channel off air,” said the tribal leader warned me on the phone. Within ten minutes of his call, armed men stormed into my office. There were more than 15 of them, all armed to the teeth. They asked me to close the office and go home. I was not prepared to but my colleague suggested that I should, if only for a while. I was arguing with the men and the situation was clearly going from bad to worse. I came out of the office without closing it. I also asked my colleagues to leave because the men were become unruly and hurling threats.

Later, after about an hour, I came back to the office and called up the police. I don’t know how we managed to get the paper published that night. There was much fear and anxiety among my colleagues and I. We just couldn’t shake off the vision of armed men crowding our office.

When I left office around midnight I thought some people were following me. I was afraid they might attack me. I asked my colleagues to accompany me and four of them came with me to my house. I am grateful to them for not leaving me alone. I did not speak to my family and children because I did not want to cause them alarm. I could not sleep well that night. I kept thinking of the armed men in my office. I wondered if it was just a bullying tactic or did they really come with the intent to harm. I got an answer two days later when my office vehicle was set on fire.

That is when I started thinking about what may come next. I requested the police to provide me security. It was discomfiting for me to be escorted to the office and the field by police every day.

I then took a risk and called on the tribal politician to explain that it was not my fault but, if at all, of the TV presenter in Islamabad. Around the same time, certain political parties and government functionaries were forcing me to register a police case against the politician. But my colleagues advised me not to. We made it clear that the fault was not at our end. After a week, the journalist fraternity intervened on my behalf. They had negotiations with the tribal politician and at the end of the day we had a reconciliation of sorts. But for days before that, I suffered through severe stress, worrying about my safety and that of my family.

There has always been pressure from the political parties and tribal personalities to give them greater coverage in newspapers. I have been working for different media organizations in Balochistan since 1990. I started with *Meezan* news paper in Quetta and now am engaged with bureau chief of *Express TV* and resident editor for *Express* newspaper in the city. I particularly face many problems when it comes to my newspaper. *Express* is a well-circulated newspaper. Everyone wants to get statements published in a prominent space in the newspaper. And there is always someone unhappy with what they deem is inadequate coverage. The election time is especially stressful as the campaigning is done through the media.

Tuning in to news reports of my abduction in captivity

Riaz Mengal

Reporter, Balochistan

I am a journalist based in district Khuzdar since the mid-1990s. I work for daily *Intikhab*, wire agency *Online*, *Sindh TV* and *Dawn TV* simultaneously. Considering that Khuzdar is to Balochistan what Balochistan is to Pakistan in terms of the adverse conditions to practice journalism, like other journalists in my region, I am careful while reporting events with a view to not offend anyone. I usually remain underground because in recent months and years Khuzdar has become a tough spot for journalists.

I speak from experience. In 2007 I was kidnapped by the son of a former caretaker chief minister for reporting how he released two impounded stolen vehicles by local the police on the behest of a tribal and political leader. I remained 52 days in the captivity of my kidnapers in the mountains of Mastung until one night I managed to escape during the night and reached Quetta. My appeal in Balochistan High Court against a lower court judgment of acquitting the son of the former chief minister and his accomplices has been pending since 2008.

I published the story for my newspaper about police injustices in the district, impounding stolen motorcycles while releasing two impounded stolen vehicles on the bidding of a political and tribal leader without mentioning his name. However, the leader contacted me and asked me to contradict the story. I told him that the story did not carry the name of anyone and since the story is based on facts, I stood to lose credibility if I disowned my own story. On October, 11, 2007, one of two vehicles carrying the politico and several of his gunmen hit my motorcycle from behind near Baldia Park. When I fell, the armed guards forced me in the vehicle and drove to an unknown location. They kept driving for hours on end, stopped at various places for rest and carried in this vein for three days. All this while I was blindfolded with my limbs tied up.

My captors told me I was being punished for disobeying the orders of their leader and not contradicting my news story. They were violent and subjected me to torture and manhandling during these three days. Later they handed me over to a group of bandits who kept me in mountains for 49 days by the end of which I had lost all hope of freedom and believed I would be executed eventually. I kept thinking about my family and aged parents day and night. I kept asking them why they were keeping me hostage and they would only say this was their “assignment.” I was fed only dried bread and water in used diesel and kerosene containers.

They had a radio and they used to tune into BBC and VOA. On both services I heard news reports of my abduction and journalists organizations, especially Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists protesting my disappearance. My captors never knew the reports were about me. On the night of November 25 I managed to slip away into the night and kept walking. After several hours I found myself in a town in Mastung district. From there I borrowed money from someone to pay for my fare to travel to my newspaper office in Quetta.

Lynched by an angry, mourning mob

Riaz Sohail

Cameraman / Reporter, Sindh

I suddenly heard a loud exclamation: “*Pakro is salay ko*, he may be the suicide bomber!” Before I knew what was happening, the crowd had turned to me and some from amongst it grabbed me and pinned me to the ground. They were already inflamed after a bomb blast in a *Muharram* religious procession. When someone pointed towards me, the mob jumped at the chance to vent. They took off my shirt. For some dark seconds I thought: this is it; they will kill me.

It was a barmy evening in Karachi. The heat was beginning to subside and the *Muharram* rally was moving towards its final destination. At around 4:15, a giant of a blast shook the area near the lighthouse. My house was a kilometer away from the blast site and I heard both the deafening sound and the whirring ambulance sirens responding to a situation already anticipated in reserve. With the journalist’s instinct I picked up my camera and a recorder, started my motorbike and rushed towards MA Jinnah Road to document. On the way I saw protesters crying, beating their chests and raising slogans. Some were rushing away from the scene. It was chaos.

My dress was colored, sticking me out as a sore thumb in a sea of mourners dressed in all traditional black. I pushed my way through the crowd and had almost reached the blast site when suddenly a few charged young men stopped me. As they threw endless questions at me, the number of people gathered around grew larger. Someone said, “Catch him and search, he may be a suicide bomber!”

They asked me to take off my shirt. I kept pleading with them, explaining I was a journalist. It seemed to have no effect. Then they just put me on the ground and grabbed my shirt off themselves. One of the young men stepped forward and started groping me for hidden bombs. “Search his motorcycle too,” said someone. I looked around desperately for

someone who could help me, but nothing doing. The 'Press' plate and Karachi Press Club sticker were prominently displayed on my motorcycle. But they chose to ignore them.

They found my flash microphone. "Is this a gun?" someone asked? I explained it was a voice recorder and showed them how it worked. Then they asked me to show me my press card. I showed it to them. Then they started bashing the media. Abuses were hurled at me; curses that would normally send anyone flying off the handle. I realized that any reaction I showed then might be the end of me. I knew if even one of them got violent, others would follow suit. This made me stay quiet. As abuses against media continued, I felt for the first time that my profession has not remained a respectable one.

Finally I was allowed to leave. I ran towards my bike and rushed to the office. Through the numbness in my mind, I only had one recurring thought – there was a new link brewing between the media and the public and it was not a friendly one.

Forced to kiss my tormentor's feet and humiliated

Majeed Sahir*

Reporter, Sindh

There are various kinds of torture that one can inflict on someone. I've heard stories of my journalist friends being subjected to physical torture. I know of colleagues who were threatened, abducted, kicked and punched. But there is another kind of torture, one that doesn't kill you but makes a deep dent to your self-esteem. Its motive is to break you psychologically, to hurt your sense of self-worth.

What am I talking about? After the massive 2010 floods, stories of rampant corruption emerged. I was reporting on the floods and wrote about alleged corruption in distribution of aid. When I got a call from the son of a legislator, I wasn't too worried. He sounded pleasant enough on the phone and asked if I could come visit him in the Tehsil Municipal Admin office. With hopes of getting some official information, I went to visit him.

We exchanges greetings and initially all seemed well. Then without any warning, his tone turned angry. "Why did you write news against us? You said we have embezzled funds from the aid money," he started. "*Saeen!* That is not so. I just wrote about floods victims not getting any aid. I never mentioned your name." I still wasn't afraid. But then he started claiming that I had named some of his people. I could see the anger on his face and he started raising his voice even more.

"Who the hell do you think you journalists are? You have started thinking too highly of yourselves." His anger was now directed at all journalists. I said that giving voice to the voiceless was a part of duty. But that was the wrong thing to say. My answer angered both him and his younger brother, who was also present in that room. "How dare you answer back to my brother?" the younger one roared. "Now you have to pay for your attitude. Go beg for forgiveness from my brother. Kiss his feet and beg."

There was no way I was going to kiss his feet. I was scared, but I was also indignant. I wasn't going to suffer that humiliation. I told myself I won't bend, no matter what they did, I won't kiss his feet. Then I discovered

armed guards had come in and I found myself surrounded by them. They pointed their guns at me and I wondered if they would really kill me. I was alone in that office and I had not told anyone that I was going to meet them. The situation had turned bad very quickly, from a pleasant enough phone conversation, I was now stuck in a room full of armed men and two men who seemed to be drunk on power and unhinged by anger.

Desperate, I tried to appeal to their common sense. I asked them to look at the papers which would prove I had not written anything against them; I had never even written their names. But they just wouldn't listen. Then on cue from the younger brother the guards pushed me to the ground and started physically pushing me around. They caught me by my arms and neck. I tried to loosen their grip but they dragged me to the elder son of the legislator.

My face was now pushed down till my mouth was touching his feet. They held me like that constantly telling me to apologize. I was stunned into silence. Forced to sit on fours with my mouth on a politicians' shoes and armed men pushing guns in my back; I had never imagined that I would have to face such a humiliating situation. Finally, after humiliating me enough they let me go.

My mind was in a spin as I walked back to the press club, broken psychologically. I hadn't been tortured physically but I felt real pain. I hadn't realized mental torture would be so painful. For a while I wondered whether I should just keep it to myself. But then, I shared the whole incident with some friends at the press club. They encouraged me to go public. And I decided to share the story of my humiliation on air.

A number of news organizations carried the story. The journalist community rallied its support and a series of protests started. For my own safety, I went to hide somewhere in Balochistan. As the protests increased, the home minister of Sindh province had to take notice and finally issued an order to arrest the sons of his own party's MP. Senior Superintendent of Police of Jacobabad prepared to make the arrest. The MP then came to Jacobabad from Karachi and visited our press club. He asked for forgiveness and said that if I couldn't forgive him then he'd surrender himself to the police. Keeping in mind the cultural norms in Sindh in such a situation, I had to forgive him. I felt humiliated all over again.

** The name has been changed on reporter's request.*

Perceived as an enemy of the state

Shahzada Zulfikar

Reporter / Editor, Balochistan

It was 2005 when I and one of my friends Carlotta Gall, the then Islamabad-based *New York Times* reporter and another reporter of *Times* of London visited Baloch nationalist Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, a couple of months before his murder in the mountains. When she wrote an article in her newspaper, I was summoned by an officer of Military Intelligence, who had been dealing with the affairs of Balochistan in his office. The attitude of the military officer worried me. And when one of my friends told me that the officer had told him that he had got orders from high ups to 'sort' me out 'good and proper,' I started to panic.

At home I shared the information with only my brother. I immediately went low profile and started informing my friends and brother whenever summoned by the authorities. I kept changing my daily schedule to put off anyone who may have been assigned to 'sort me out'. I avoided telling anyone on phone where I was and where I was headed next. I did not, however, think of moving out of Quetta at any stage. My whole family is here and I thought when I did not do anything wrong why should I flee? And even if I did, it would only deepen suspicions about me by the authorities.

Later I was sent to a brigadier-rank military officer, the in-charge of the MI in Quetta. He kept me there for about 100 minutes asking how much money the 'anti-Pakistan' leader offered me to bring the foreign journalists to him. "You are anti-state and involved in such activities to help anti-Pakistan elements," he alleged. When I was leaving his office, he warned me: "I have orders to fix you up if you do not realize that you have done a grave wrong. If you repeat the same mistake, you will have to face the consequences." Later, one of my politician friends disclosed to me that he was told by the officer that he had received orders from higher ups to not hesitate to "wipe him out if he does not mend his ways."

Later when I was president of the Quetta Press Club in 2008, Brahmdagh Bugti, the self-exiled leader of 'Baloch Republican Party' hosted a lunch for journalists in December in the Officer's Club. His party's secretary approached me for names of invitees and I provided him the list of press club members. The result? I was sacked from *Samaa TV* as bureau chief on pressure from security forces. The forces were also angry with me for interviewing Abdul Malik Regi, a high profile anti-Iranian leader close to the Afghan-Iran border. The interview was telecast from *Samaa TV* and published in monthly *Herald* magazine. The Iranian government, in a letter, accused a paramilitary force in Balochistan of closing its eyes towards anti-Iranian elements, saying, "when a journalist can interview Malik Regi, then why can't [the security forces] hunt him?"

Later there was continuous pressure on me from the intelligence agencies about my meetings with foreign diplomats during their visits to Quetta city. "Stop asking questions about Baloch missing persons from the president, the prime minister, the interior minister and Pakistan People's Party leaders during their visits to Quetta as you have been discussed [in security circles] about your attitude - otherwise you will be harmed," the same politician friend having good relations with the agencies warned me.

Once I was summoned by a colonel-rank officer of an intelligence agency, telling me, "You and American diplomats are hatching conspiracies against Pakistan." When I insisted for evidence for such a serious allegation against a journalist, he avoided to give a direct answer, saying: "Ok, I then ask you to inform us if you smell any conspiracy – no, not as agent, but as a patriotic Pakistani." I stared at him dumbfounded.

Then there was the time when I along with one of my friends working for an NGO training journalists in Balochistan, were abducted by armed gunmen on June 19, 2012. They made out as if they were robbers but I believe they were intelligence operatives on their way back to Quetta from Khuzdar. I had gone to Khuzdar for a training session for local journalists in the Khuzdar Press Club. The captors kept us in their custody blindfolded and left us in the mountains after taking away cash, computers, mobile and our rented car.

I approached the inspector general of the paramilitary force and the chief secretary of Balochistan government. Both assured me to recover

all our belongings 'within days.' These assurances have proved unfruitful to date. An administrative official provided the names of our captors saying it was an open secret in Khuzdar who these people are. The final evidence was provided by an Islamabad-based TV anchor who visited Khuzdar in 2012 quoting a senior police officer who pointed towards one of the participants of a protest rally against that TV anchorperson. "That is the young person who snatched the computer, vehicle and mobile of Shahzada Zulfiqar."

Shahzada Zulfiqar was born in Kalat in 1963. After doing schooling and intermediate, he did his master's in 1990 from the University of Baluchistan in Mass Communication. He joined the profession in 1988 by joining daily Muslim and then later The Nation. He has reported for monthly magazine Newslite from 1992 to 2004 and also for Herald (2004 to 2010). Other media organizations he has worked for include AFP and Pakistan Today. He has also served as president of both Quetta Press Club and Baluchistan Union of Journalists.

From criticism to critical to cancellation to comeback

Shakil Jatala
Editor, Punjab

This is a story from the time of Pervaiz Musharraf's dictatorial regime. The year was 2004 and the general's patronized Pakistan Muslim League-Q was in power. District government system was still intact and Makhdoom Ahmed of the party was the district nazim (mayor) in Rahim Yar Khan in south Punjab. His local government suddenly made a decision to collect toll tax from the region's citizens and immediately implemented. The move was unpopular and a community uproar began.

Among the local media openly opposing the decision was daily *Kalam-e-Waqt*. I was its editor. We prominently published reactions against the decision. On top of it, an opposition leader of the Pakistan People's Party, Dr. Muneer Shah took out an advertisement against it, which was carried by the paper for several days.

Opposition to the tax by *Kalam-e-Waqt* did not go well with the local rulers. As tension over the tax escalated, I and some of my colleagues became the targets for the district government. The official reaction began with threatening messages sent by the district nazim and his team. We were specifically ordered not to write or publish anything against the imposition of the tax. I made the editorial decision not to be intimidated by these threats and we carried on the publication of statements and news on the issue. The local government wasn't so easily deterred. When they saw that their verbal threats had failed to have the desired impact, they chose another course of action.

The nazim's office contacted Retired Captain Ata Mohammad, the sitting district commissioner of Rahim Yar Khan, who proceeded to cancel the declaration of *Kalam-e-Waqt*, thus effectively closing down the publication. For added measure the administration forcefully shut down our printing press as well. *Kalam-e-Waqt* ceased publication. The government did not stop there. As a homeopathic doctor I owned two

medical stores in Rahim Yar Khan. After the newspaper's closure, the district administration came to the medical stores and sealed them without an explanation. The stores remained sealed for two months.

Soon, cases were filed against both me and the publisher, Khalid Arshad. A close aide of the district nazim asked both of us to report to the local police station. When we got there the aide was in a meeting with the Station House Officer. The SHO immediately ordered his subordinates to arrest us.

Somehow we managed to escape. This now made us officially fugitives. We went underground. My family wanted me to quit journalism and go back to medical practice in another part of the country. I had by then spent two decades in journalism and just couldn't bear myself to stay away. I filed a constitutional petition against the cancellation of the paper's declaration in the Bahawalpur Bench of the Lahore High Court. After hearing spread over two months, the court announced that the cancellation of the declaration of *Kalam-e-Waqt* was illegal. We were back and now also had the law's protection.

The added vulnerability of women in journalism

Shumaila Jaffery
Reporter, Punjab

Election season was in swing. I was leaving for Swabi district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to do a story on areas where women were barred from voting in the past. One of my colleagues said on a lighter note: “You are a woman yourself – going to a conservative region to report on a contentious issue. The place is crawling with jihadi types. What if someone harms you? Let me interview you so I can write an emotional obituary later.”

Just a joke in the newsroom, yes – but it reflects the state of mind in which we journalists work these days, grappling with a dilemma: should we care more for journalism or for ourselves? I face this dilemma every now and then. Should I tell this story or should I let it go for my own safety? Most of the times my passion for storytelling wins but sometimes I just opt to stay safe so I can tell more stories in the future.

In the fall of 2012 when internationally renowned girl education activist Malala Yousafzai was attacked by the Taliban, I was in South Waziristan to report on the region with military providing me protection. When I heard the news fear struck me. It was unprecedented for people of South Waziristan to have a female reporter and a camera crew among them. I felt that I stood out in the community and could be targeted easily. First I thought I should leave without completing my project, but then I decided to stick it out.

Travelling back from Waziristan to Lahore a few days later, I was hoping to get back to my own secure environment. But I received an email from my line manager, saying that out-of-city trips would be postponed for some time, and that the crews working outside home stations had been told to move back immediately. I realized that the situation for the media was bad even outside Taliban-controlled neighborhoods. Before I could reach home, I received another message that we would be working from

our homes rather than from office due to credible security threats. By the time I came back home to Lahore, the environment had completely changed. I learned that extremists had threatened senior TV anchorpersons and big media houses for supporting Malala and condemning the attack on her that nearly killed her.

In recent years Pakistan has become a volatile place to practice journalism. We have found ourselves in the top 10 deadliest countries for journalists for as many years. Dozens have lost their lives in the line of duty in this period. But I have never felt as threatened as I did for the weeks after the attack on Malala. Forced to work from home felt like a violation of my fundamental rights. It felt as if I was being punished. But this was just the beginning. One day, while I was out shopping with my mother, I received a phone call from one of my colleagues asking me check with our local security guard whether anybody had inquired about my personal and family details and particularly about my sect within the last few days. He said some of our colleagues had discovered some people were collecting this information and that a meeting of journalists had been organized at the Lahore Press Club to discuss this situation.

I felt a shudder of fear travel down my spine. I felt so vulnerable that I just dropped my shopping and pulled my mother back to home without explaining anything so as to spare her anxiety even though she asked what was wrong. I just mumbled some excuse. For days I was jittery, and kept changing places. My colleagues and I continued working nonetheless – keeping a carefully low profile. It took a month to our get personal and official lives back to normal.

A few days later Ajmal Kasab, the lone survivor of the infamous Mumbai attacks of 2008, got hanged in India, I was asked by my media house to visit his ancestral town Faridkot in Okara district in Punjab province to gauge the mood there after his execution. We just went to his house, where no one lives now, and talked to the people on the street. While we were up and about, first some unknown persons who claimed to be locals used nasty language against my cameraperson and stopped him from filming, and then another shoddy character appeared on the scene along with a police van.

This guy claimed to be some local politician, threatened us, asked me to waste the footage and material that we had shot, and told me

straightaway that I couldn't leave until I did as he asked. Horrified with the thought of deleting my precious clips and of staying in their custody and I wondered how I was going to deal with this menacing situation. To our luck, the shady character received a call on his mobile phone and he went aside to talk in private. We grabbed our chance, got into our car and sped off.

Being a journalist in Pakistan isn't easy at the best of time but for female to work on the frontlines is tougher still. The threats are numerous and often materialize into violent action. The religious, sectarian, ethnic and gender identities, along with stories that you do that offend others, can get you in trouble anywhere, anytime. To stay safe journalists often are forced to

But suffering is not personal alone; every journalist has to make professional compromises. There was this instance when a graveyard of the Ahmedi minority religious community was attacked and vandalized in Lahore no local TV channel covered the news except me. But for my personal security my organization decided to run the item without my byline. It's not just bylines – sometimes you have to drop your story altogether. When renowned Shia eye specialist Dr Ali Haider was assassinated in Lahore, I was unable to cover his target killing due to my own sectarian identity. For every story we do, we have become used to conjecturing about likely fallout and adverse consequences. For reasons of safety of journalists, no wonder the quality of journalism is suffering.

Cheating an obituary by a whisker!

Sohaib Alvi

Producer, Sindh

It was a fine Friday in February of 2010. I came to *Dawn News TV* for a routine shift. I was the senior producer mandated with facilitating generation of content for broadcast. I had started my career as a reporter for *Indus TV* but after joining *Geo News TV*, my job was mostly restricted to production and post-production, which had paid put to my outdoor days.

Renowned cricket writer Gul Hameed Bhatti had passed away and I was thinking of sending a reporter and a cameraman to cover the funeral. But I couldn't find a reporter available. It was destiny that brought me, someone who had been out of touch with field work for six years, back to reporting. I took along Haider Ali, the heavily-built cameraman, to Abu Bakar Siddiq Mosque opposite the National Sailing Centre in Clifton by the Karachi seaside. Although I was depressed at the demise of Bhatti sahib, who had been a mentor and source of inspiration for many writers like me, I was also looking forward to meeting old friends after a long time!

The coverage went well. I reconnected with old colleagues and we also paid our respects to Bhatti sahib. On our way back to the office Ali got an SMS alert about a bomb blast at Baloch Colony Flyover. Apparently a suicide bomber on a motorcycle laden with explosives had slammed into a bus carrying Shia pilgrims. Several died on the spot and many sustained injuries. The bus was carrying pilgrims set to join a religious Chehllum procession at Nishtar Park. The attack was reminiscent of bombings at Ashura procession three months earlier in which over 40 people were killed. This time, the injured had to be given medical aid and I was asked by the Assignment Editor to drop Ali at Jinnah Post Graduate Medical Centre for coverage.

We turned toward the hospital. Ambulances carrying the injured started overtaking us. As I entered the hospital gate to drop Ali, I was given

orders that I should also follow him into the Emergency Ward as a stand-in reporter for the video feed. I parked my car at the only place available—beside a ‘No Parking’ sign by a shop. Inside the hospital I found myself among dozens of injured. There was blood everywhere, and wailing of people. I wasn’t used to it. For someone with experience of only reporting entertainment and sports, reporting a tragedy like this at short notice affected me.

I asked Ali to get as much visuals and soundbites as he could while I go and get the body count and other details. It was difficult but there were other reporters and we managed to wade through the mayhem and get the accurate latest death count and some eyewitness accounts. I was horror-struck as the numbers of the injured started to decrease and the death count climbed before our eyes. Reporters around me, who were used to covering conflict and attacks of this nature, went about round me focused on their job but seemed almost indifferent to the human misery in a primal state.

There was a Shia scholar at the hospital who was trying to calm down the relatives of the deceased. There were chances of a conflict with the rival sect but with the help of religious scholars, through television, it was averted. Renowned philanthropist Abdul Sattar Edhi was also present at the hospital monitoring the situation and facilitating the needy.

Somebody told my mother I was spotted at the hospital at some TV channel and she started crying thinking I was among the injured. Like me she could not have anticipated a field reporting assignment for me. I calmed her on the phone. It had been almost an hour and I had given several live beepers with updates for our viewers and I was dead exhausted. I asked Ali to pack up. Somehow the office lines were jammed and I couldn’t get through to the Newsroom that we were heading back.

We got into our car and I saw a motorbike parked beside our car with a small TV tied to it. “How odd,” I told Ali as our car reversed and made toward the hospital gate. We had barely reached the gate when a deafening blast occurred, shattering cars and glasses and a white plume of smoke went up, slowly turning ashen color. It later transpired that the TV set we saw strapped on the bike was packed with explosives. We had missed death by a whisker. Thirteen people died in the hospital blast. The toll could have been 15 and this could have been an obituary instead of a testimonial.

The perils of being the guardian of public interest

Tahir Baloch

Reporter, Punjab

When threats to journalists go unnoticed and attacks against them unpunished it creates impunity and virtually guarantees more attacks will continue. While there are several groups that benefit from browbeating the media, I faced threats and torture from an unlikely source: employees of an NGO. It all happened in 2010. Massive floods had wreaked havoc across the country, including the river deltas traversing the Land of Rivers – Punjab. Like any natural disaster, the floods led to intense news coverage.

Initially, the stories focused on death and devastation. As time passed the focus of the news shifted to rehabilitation and aid. International aid was pouring in and as different organizations started implementing the aid projects, stories of corruption and embezzlement started surfacing.

I was working on flood-related stories in north Punjab and came across evidence that a local NGO was embezzling funds generated for flood affected communities in Union Council Bait Wawaya and Kot Sultan. I found out that the NGO, managing the funds to arrange temporary residence specifically for the people of these two areas, were actually distributing aid in another city and handing over aid money within their own circle of affectees. Meanwhile, the flood affected people in Kot Sultan were forced to live on the streets without any shelter.

I worked on the story gathering evidence. The staff of the NGO fumed when they learnt I was going to file a story about them for publication. They met me in Kot Sultan in a public place and asked for a copy of the news report before it was published. I could, of course, not do this as I was under no obligation to share drafts with people I report about. This gravely upset them. They pounced on me and started punching and kicking me. I screamed for help but none of the people around us or passers by stopped them, emboldening the attackers to intensify my beating.

They asked for a copy and I told them it was on my laptop in my bag. They forced me to open it and deleted it from the folder as well as from the recycle bin, making sure I had no record of it left. I was released on the condition I would write about them again.

I went straight to the district coordination officer (DCO) of the area and complained. The DCO instead of helping on the contrary asked me why was I reporting in the area without his permission. He flatly refused to take any action against the people who had tortured me even though I could show him my bruises. I was depressed. I haven't gone back to the district again and for a while stopped investigating stories that might lead to confrontation and coercive intimidation.

I have realized that nobody cares for the security of journalists, not even civil society organizations who instead of considering an attack on media as an attack on freedom of expression actually go ahead and join in the harassment of journalists working on public interest issues. With no one to help me, I'm obviously going to help myself by compromising on the basics of journalism by self-censoring myself where I think it can buy me some safety.

Journalism from the shadows

Siraj Sangjani*

Reporter, Balochistan

I have been in journalism for about a decade now. I have worked with local and international media organizations and among other things covered the issues of the missing persons, sectarian killings and insurgency in the context of Balochistan. In a province torn by target killings, insurgency and suicide attacks, the international focus on conflict in the region has meant a persistent, deeper coverage of events. This has not come easy to me as the consequences have shown.

Particularly haunting was 2011 when dead, mutilated bodies of the missing political workers were making news. The nationalists were blaming the paramilitary forces and intelligence agencies for the killings. The state agencies were accusing the nationalists of being behind them. The state authorities regularly put out their version and to report on these issues I was often required to cover the perspective of the nationalists to provide a context to the story.

One morning as I left my house for the office, a neighbor stopped and alerted me to two men on a bridge close to my house. He said they had been coming to the bridge for some days now and suspected that I was under surveillance. He asked if I knew them. I didn't. "Whenever you leave home, they also disappear," he said. "You should be careful."

The next morning I looked. Sure enough, the same two men on the bridge. I passed them by and after walking for a while turned around to check on them. They were staring at me. It was clear they were there for my surveillance. The next day they were there again. Same persons, same place, same posture – looking at me. This time I hurried past and did not look back. I turned a corner and doubled back under cover to look for them from another street. They were gone. This settled it then: they were there for me.

I reached my office and wrote an email to my administration with details. The office instructed me to go underground. I stopped reporting for about a month but I was not comfortable sitting at home. I would send my kids to get me a credit card for my mobile phone. And then there were

all these questions from my family – they wanted to know why I wasn't going to work anymore. I just informed my wife about the whole story. She was shocked. She wanted me to quit journalism. I told her I couldn't – it was my life.

Staying bunkered at home was getting to me. After one month I reckoned the threat had subsided and I asked my office if I could be back to the deck. The office agreed but asked me to make my movement unpredictable, using different means of transport, changing routes and time of arrival and departure from office. And then in September 2011 it suddenly ended.

I did something stupid which may have stopped it or it may have ended for some other reason. I noticed that a man in plainclothes used to follow me from home to office. I noted this for four days and then finally I could take it no more. I decided to confront him. When I saw him next, I just turned and stared at him silently. He stared back. I kept looking at him even as I feared he just might attack me now that I have decided to call him out. I then walked towards a busy road and stopped there. The man followed me some way but then stopped. I stood there for a long time. After some time, he just walked past me and left. After he left, I kept standing till I was sure he was gone. And then I came to my office.

I still haven't figured out who were the people that surveilled and followed me. The whole thing affected me deeply psychologically. It changed the way I used to work and prioritized my safety. I still work at the office but send my stories from somewhere outside. I take as much care as I can but now I look at everyone around me with suspicion. I have grown into the habit of watching my back, anticipating a lunge by someone to knife me or shoot me. Whenever I get a call on my phone without the number identified, I don't take it but keep thinking about it for weeks. I keep thinking it may be from the same people even though I don't know who they are.

** The name has been changed on reporter's request.*

Long-distance threats, long-term consequences

Yousaf Ali

Reporter, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Killing and threatening journalists is not all too uncommon in Pakistan but journalists from the tribal borderlands are up against myriad security hazards, the scope and intensity of which put threats aimed at media elsewhere in the shade. Working for several years now for daily *The News* I've found myself faced with antagonism from tribal leaders in the Bajaur, the tribal agency I hail from, when I did a story about the murder of a young man. The person accused of being the killer, a local influential, got angry when reported about. In the tribal areas where there is no local media and discriminatory laws restrict freedom of expression and assembly, many locals are not educated or aware about the way media works, often seeing its role as antagonistic to local customs and traditions.

In March 2012, I was in the United States for a three-week journalist exchange visit. At the end of my visit, I was all ready to leave for Pakistan when my family members insisted I prolong my stay, or better still avoid coming back. They didn't say why even when I insisted. They just insisted. I was on a restricted time visa and could not violate laws to stay back. Finally my wife informed me that some influential tribesmen of Bajaur had threatened to kill me.

It transpired they were angry about a news story that I facilitated the publication of just before leaving about a relative of mine killed. The news was published in various newspapers without my name or byline and had mentioned some names of the accused, as the deceased had been picked up from his small medical store in Gardai town in broad daylight, mercilessly killed in the night and throw his mutilated body in a nearby stream.

Obviously they believed the murder would go unnoticed though it had been committed near the paramilitary Frontier Corps fort and check-

point. I had merely tried to acquire some space in media for it so that his impoverished family could get some justice – something unthinkable in the typical tribal society, which is driven by the principle of might is right. The accused had gotten in touch with my family and finding out that I was abroad had told them to ask me to stay abroad if I valued my life.

I flew back home and restricted my movements. Frustrated at not being able to confront me they kept sending me threatening messages through my family. I could no longer go to Bajaur for either personal or professional purposes. I was advised not to travel alone anywhere and go out of home only after dark.

This way of life was, of course, inimical to being a journalist. My media organization, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, and the Pakistan Journalist Safety Fund, helped in those dark days. Slowly, as the months passed, I managed to get a modicum of my earlier life back. But I still restrict my movements and I pine to go back to my beloved Bajaur but I still can't.

A police encounter

Zahid Rajpur
Reporter, Sindh

The roads along the bank of Pakistan's mighty River Indus are rickety. If you travel along small towns, you won't find much traffic, especially if it is getting dark. The police mobile was travelling along such a road. The drive must have been jerky and uncomfortable, but that, I didn't even notice. My hands were tied behind my back and we were travelling to Kuch, a small town. We had been travelling for half an hour, perhaps the longest 30 minutes of my life. That day as we trundled along the long road to Kuch, I thought I will not live to see another sunrise.

It was January 19, 1998. All these years later I still vividly remember what happened and how it all felt then. I was working on a story about a scam – an agricultural piece of land allotted by the government to small farmers had been instead given to an influential feudal. My investigation concluded that the scam had been enacted with support from the deputy commissioner. It was late evening when I finished writing the story. As I walked out of my office, I was greeted by bitter cold. I didn't have any facility to fax the story at home. We certainly didn't have emails back then. I walked towards the public call office (PCO) to fax my handwritten story to the office. A couple of my journalist friends were with me, Qazi Zulfiqar and Sarwar Leghari. We walked towards the PCO into the dark night.

With the faxing done, we had barely walked out of the PCO, when suddenly, we found ourselves surrounded by policemen. One of the police inspectors came to me with a paper. "This is a warrant for your arrest. We are here to arrest you," he said. I had no other option but to go with them. They took me to the Central Investigation Agency police station. "Why have I been arrested?" I asked them. They told me that I was wanted by the Muhabat Dero Police on suspicion of my involvement in a case of goat theft. Apparently, an FIR for the theft of a goat had already been registered against me. After a while, CIA police drove me to Muhabat Dero Police Station. Here, I was pushed into the lock up, where a young man was already present.

As the night progressed it wasn't just the fear that chilled my spine; the night was itself bitterly cold. I could hear rain and thunder outside and shivered inside the spare cold cell. There was nothing to cover myself with and I shivered uncontrollably. There was no toilet. The stench was unbearable. I hadn't eaten in hours. It all made me feel dreadfully weak and it seemed I would die that very night. I couldn't sleep a wink. In the morning I was taken out of the lockup and told that I was going to meet the Station House Officer. The SHO wasn't versed with the art of subtlety. He greeted me with curses, verbal abuse was flung and threats of dire consequences made.

"Have you found out what happens when you try to file a story against the deputy commissioner?" the SHO asked. "You think last night was bad? *Zara dekho ab tumharay saath kya kartay hain* [Wait to see what we have in store for you]." The police dragged me to a judicial magistrate for remand. I took the chance and pleaded to the judge, telling him that I am a journalist and am being framed in a staged case. I told the judge that my life was in danger and the police would kill me if they got the remand.

The judge gauged the gravity of the situation and refused to issue remand orders, which infuriated the police even more. The SHO, who had threatened me that morning, now ordered his team to move me to Kandyaro Police Station. Here, I was locked in another dismal room. I braced myself. I had barely been there a few minutes when another team of policemen barged in. They tied my hands behind my back. I was dragged to a mobile van like a criminal and checked in the back. The van started moving across a narrow bumpy road. I was paralyzed with fear. Thoughts of impending death pooled into my head and I became convinced this was the end.

After travelling some way the van stopped. We were parked in front of Bakhri Police Station. The inspector dragged me out. "Lock him up here for now. We will finish him off later." Now I *knew* they were planning to kill me. The lockup in Bakhri station did not even have a floor. My feet were covered with mud, my teeth were chattering in the cold and I wondered if I'd die of the cold before the police got a chance to kill me. They had not given me a morsel to eat or a sip to drink since the arrest. My throat was parched. I decided not to give up. I would lose my life but not my dignity.

An hour later I was dragged out of the lockup again. Once again, my hands were tied and I was thrown into the mobile van. Surely they were going to kill me now and spare themselves the burden of lugging me around. We must have been on the road for half an hour when I noticed we were travelling along the beautiful Indus. I could make out even more policemen across the river. When we braked to a stop, I saw it was the SHO from Muhabat Dero Police Station and his crew again.

“Are you ready to apologize to the DC?” the SHO shouted. “No, I didn’t make up that story,” I said, anger welling up in me. “You really don’t learn do you?” he said and pushed me back into the mobile. I was taken back to the Muhabat Dero Police station and thrown into the stinking lockup. I sat there wondering what was next, when I saw my newspaper’s team walking into the station. They were accompanied by Deputy Superintendent of Kandyaro Police. In that instant, I knew I had been saved from a likely staged encounter that police use to eliminate some people.

I was taken into judicial custody for four days, treated decently and fed a bit. Investigations continued. I wasn’t scared of dying anymore. Newspapers across Sindh had published the story of my arrest. Journalist friends in Karachi had staged a walkout from Sindh Assembly in protest and opposition parties had expressed open support for journalists. Chief Minister Liaquat Jatoi ordered me released. I got bailed. I later found out that I hadn’t been implicated in just one case. There were three. Apart from being accused of stealing a goat I was also charged with running away with a cow and dacoity. If only my life were that interesting!

Food for thought

Zeeshan Ahmed
Reporter, Sindh

It was November 2012. I had just returned from a hectic day of reporting. It was 4pm and as the office canteen was unable to serve us quality lunch, I left with my fellow reporter Asim Khan for Kharadar to feed a growling stomach. We left our office at West Wharf on my motorbike to fill in the tummy, but what we got was a couple full on-the-tummy!

The start of the first month of the Islamic Calendar was just around the corner. Security was beefed up for the first 10 days of the month of Muharram, which are sacred for especially the Shia community. Processions are taken out from different parts of the city and merge at Numaish Chowrangi ending at Kharadar. Muharram processions had been soft targets for terrorists lately. Usually police on patrol don't indulge in scuffles with media people because if things get out of hand, that particular officer might end up suspended. But with the sensitive days approaching, the police is on the lookout for such opportunities. We provided them with one.

We two reporters from *Dawn TV* were intercepted by a police mobile van for pillion riding which was banned for the 10 days of Muharram by the Sindh provincial government. "Why are you two on a motorbike? *Tumhay pata nahi double swari mana hai* [Aren't you aware of ban]?" asked the officer. "We are reporters from a TV channel and we are exempted from the ban by Sindh government," I started but cut short. "The notification copy we have makes no mention of such an exemption for media, so you should be given a challan," the officer cut me short.

I still wasn't worried. "Maybe your notification is incorrect or misprinted, because even a constable knows of exemption for media," I tried explaining, but that seemed to agitate the officer. "Are you going to teach us the law? Take them to the police station and teach them some manners," he barked an order to his men. I hadn't anticipated this. Both of us were taken off my bike, bundled into the mobile van and trooped off to the Kharadar Police Station.

The Kharadar area besides known for its sumptuous food becomes active as Muharram approaches. The Muharram Procession on 10th of the month ends at Hussainia Imambargah and for the police of that area those 10 days are crazy work keeping the peace and order. If the procession ends safely, it's what police is paid to ensure but if any untoward incident happens, the police has to pay a heavy price. The officer on duty has to pay numerous visits to the court for the security lapse on his part as well as the sword of transfer hanging on his head.

Being aware of all this, I knew what awaited us at the police station where the policemen were on the edge. In the meantime I had informed the Assignment Desk at the office about our 'arrest' and asked for help. By the time the help mobilized, we were in the lockup. The Station House Officer asked us into his room. We thought that some superior officer might have called for our release but with us entered six policemen and the door was locked. They set on us, raining punches, kicks and slaps for a full five minutes. The only respite in the room was the air conditioner running.

An FIR was lodged against us for assaulting a police officer. After our beating we were made to stand in the lockup for an identification parade organized by the SHO. Someone 'recognized' as the culprit. I remember the SHO's word as he left the room with a chilling message: "*Agar zinda bachay tay subah milen ge* [See you in the morning, if you are alive]!" Was he planning to get us killed in one of their infamous fake encounter? We'll never know. By that time the help we asked for reached us in the shape of *Dawn News* reporter Sohail Shabbir and cameraman Ali Jan. The latter was quick in capturing the visuals, and my torn shirt was the 'item' TV channels usually search for, to fit in the headlines. The visuals showing us beaten up spread like wildfire. The police were in trouble!

Colleagues from different TV channels, newspapers reached the Karachi Press Club to register their protest, as did colleagues from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists and Karachi Union of Journalists. They all then went to the police station and staged a protest. The Superintendent of Police intervened and ordered bail for both of us against surety of Rs5,000 each. Meanwhile Chief Justice Sindh High Court Mubashir Alam took notice and ordered a swift inquiry. The divisional judge reached the police station immediately and took the record in his custody. In the following days the issue was resolved.

Civic Action Resources – A Brief Profile

Civic Action Resources (CAR) is a legal, Pakistan-based social development organization registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). Focusing on media development, strengthening civil society and promoting public-private partnerships on development themes through advocacy, research and training, CAR's core value is to promote an informed, democratic, tolerant and progressive society through an independent professional media and core purpose is to support, promote and strengthen civic action on development issues, including media development, as a progressive tool for social progress.

Civic Action Resources has the following mandate:

1. Promoting participatory civic action on development issues:

- (a) Through a broad range of policy, advocacy, research and training initiatives
- (b) By promoting and building synergies between and among civil society stakeholders

2. Promoting media pluralisms:

- (a) By supporting socio-cultural diversity in engagement
- (b) By encouraging local voices and ownership on all development issues including but not limited to media development, conflict and security, human rights, gender equality, peace, health, education, environment, livelihood, energy, food and agriculture, water, inter-faith harmony, resources, urban and rural issues, business and economy, etc.
- (c) By raising the profile of and informing, educating and engaging media, youth, women and various minorities and marginalized communities in PART [policy, advocacy, research and training] initiatives

3. Promoting an impartial, objective and professional media; and development communications:

- (a) By promoting an impartial, objective, ethical, professional and safe

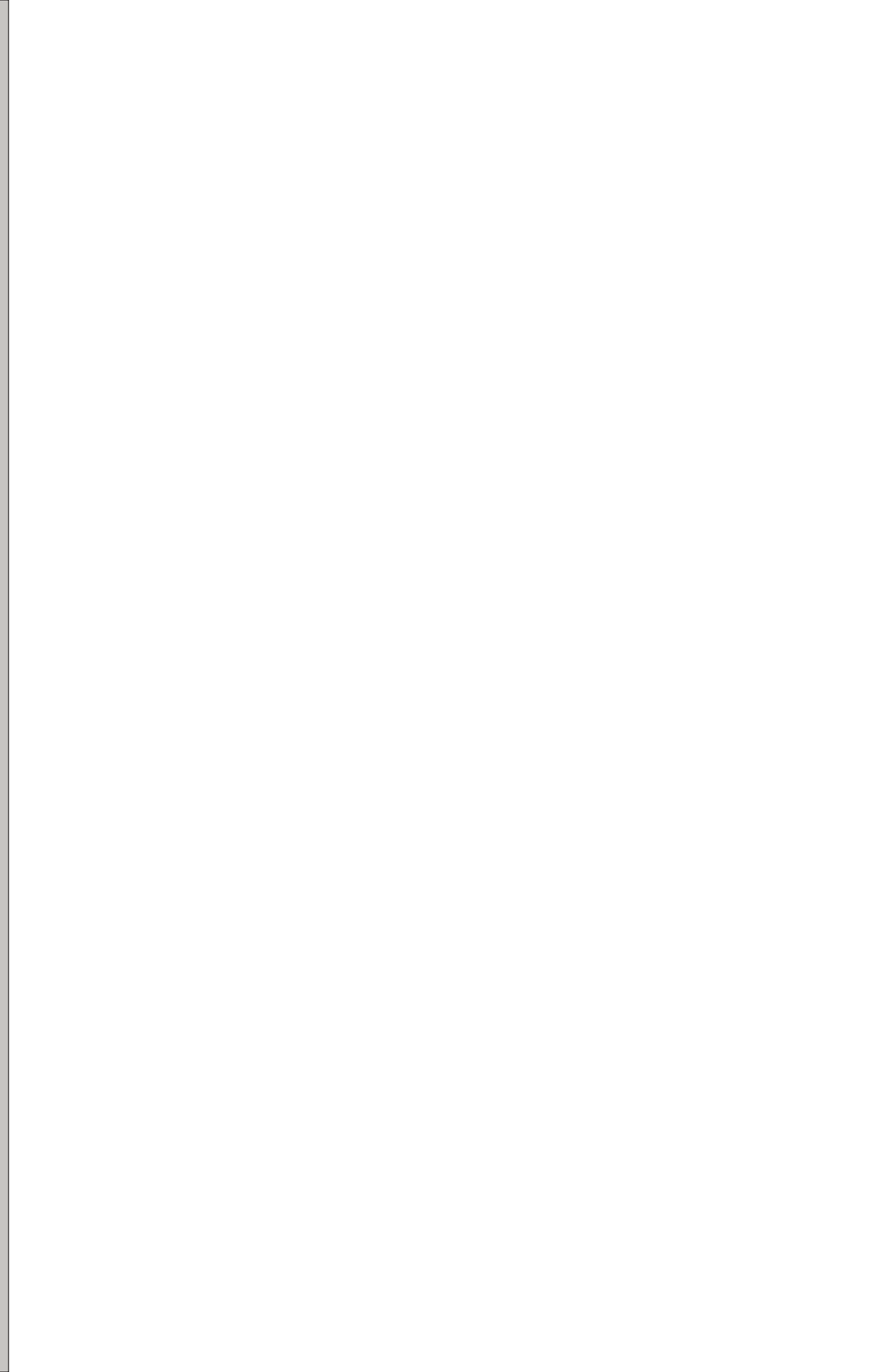
media

- (b) By promoting, supporting and conducting PART [policy, advocacy, research and training] initiatives for media
- (c) By promoting, supporting and conducting initiatives for civil society stakeholding in a pluralistic, independent, open and professional media with emphasis on professional ethics and journalism best practices
- (d) By strengthening professional development communications within and for development sector organizations (including NGOs, CBOs, CSOs, etc.) as well as for their supporters and donors
- (e) By promoting a sustainable interface between media and civil society to protect and support citizens' agendas for development

Objectives:

Civic Action Resources has a focus on promoting the following objectives:

- (a) Open, independent, unbiased, pluralist, responsible and safe media
- (b) Citizenry making informed opinions, choices and decisions
- (c) Use of technology and new media for progressive civic action
- (d) Social, cultural, political, economic and religious pluralisms
- (e) Both local and broad-based ownership of policies and development actions
- (f) Participatory and empowering democracy
- (g) A tolerant, progressive society focused on development
- (h) Peace and conflict mitigation through collaborative approaches
- (i) Peaceful and participatory civic action on all development issues
- (j) Open engagement on all development issues among stakeholders
- (k) Prioritization of peace, education, health, economic opportunity and equal human rights for all citizens



Profiles of Courage – Stories of Conviction

Pakistani journalists speak their hearts out

Over 100 journalists have been killed and more than 2,000 injured in Pakistan since 2000. Considering the high risks that about 20,000 active journalists in the country face, it is ironic that most people who benefit from their work have no clue to the conditions they work in – from navigating a climate of fear to dealing with the dilemma of their right to safety clashing with the people’s right to know; and from the woeful inadequacy of safeguards for them to the compromises they have to make to continue reporting. This publication is an attempt to fill this critical gap: to hear the stories of our daily storytellers.

And in an attempt to convey the immediacy of the daily tribulations they face we have helped the journalists tell us their stories in their own words. Hence the accounts here are the journalists’ very own – in first person singular. In some instances, we even bring the stories of journalists who lost their lives – their stories are narrated by their close friends, all fellow journalists who worked with them and knew them well. We asked the journalists to preferably tell us a specific story that could illustrate the kinds of dangers they face – an instance where they found themselves in deep trouble and even a brush with death. All these stories relate to journalists’ work, not their non-journalism related life. The stories reveal the risks to them and the vulnerabilities they face in a milieu like Pakistan’s where conflict, violence and extremism have made journalism one of the most difficult professions to practice in recent years. These here, then, are stories that have taken a great deal of courage for journalists to tell. They range from the alarming to the hair-raising. From murder to kidnap, from torture to harassment – and nearly everything else in between – it’s all here.

These profiles of courage represent the broad gamut of media and journalism work in Pakistan – geographically they’re from virtually all regions of Pakistan. Testifying to their vulnerabilities are editors, reporters, photographers, camerapersons and correspondents. Men journalists facing up to their captors and killers, and women journalists facing the brunt of harassment and intimidation – the accounts offer a representative sample of threats they face daily. Also revealed is the broad spectrum of actors that bring terror and torment to journalists’ lives: the government, political parties, security forces, intelligence agencies, militants, terrorists, religious leaders, feudal landlords, businessmen, even civil society organizations – they figure here in the hall of shame of actors tormenting Pakistani journalists.

www.civicaction.pk

